CHAPTER II
THE SENSE OF ALIENATION

A being from another world or a non-naturalized foreigner is called an alien. The term frequently in today’s chaotic and fragmented world. The modern man who feels insecure and frustrated in this modern and computerized world often feels alienated. Scientific and technological developments have bestowed on mankind new standards of living and newer ways of communication but have not mitigated human misery. The new knowledge that man has acquired has resulted only in man’s isolation. The rapidly changing value systems accruing from globalization and computerization have made tremendous demands on the individual and he feels doomed fidgety and always in race. The hiatus between his aspirations and achievements have crumpled him. Estranged from within and with others, the problem-filled, lonely, disoriented man looms large in contemporary human society. He lives lonely even in crowds. Modern-man has become a synonym to all the maladies of today: frustration, despair, isolation, rootlessness etc. all of which can be identified under one term “alienation” which is closely related to different contexts and disciplines each contributing to its meaning from the verb “alienare” which means to snatch, to avoid etc.
The novels of Bharati Mukherjee transport us to the complex realm of the culturally displaced and geographically alienated characters that migrate to the West and consequently face the tensions due to, adaptation and assimilation. She portrays in her perspective the problems faced by Indian women whose attempts to survive in a dispassionate world often isolate and alienates them. The complex journeys of the immigrants in a foreign land and the trials they undergo to adjust to the situation are the common themes in Mukherjee’s writings. The author herself being an immigrant tries to reveal the darker side of immigrant life in most of her novels. The history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences. The effects of the transfer will be harsher upon people than the society they enter. It takes the people off their traditional environments and transplants them into a strange ground where strange customs prevail. The customary modes of behaviours become inadequate to confront the problems of the new atmosphere. They are compelled to readjust and redefine themselves. With old ties snapped off, man faces the hazardous task of working with new men giving new meaning to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances. In transplantation, between the severance of old roots and the establishment of new mooring the immigrant exists in an extreme situation. This shock sometimes reaches down to
generations. The immigrant has the same chance of success of an uprooted plant. The Indian immigrants feel themselves as outsiders and not belonging to the American society. They feel that they cannot blend into the American society due to their unique culture and lifestyle. As Sushma Tandon opines:

They find out that they cannot blend easily into the American society because of their distinctive physical and cultural characteristics. They notice that they cannot share the life style of the Americans. The Indian immigrants’ start feeling structurally isolated although they are professionally settled in America. Thus the feeling of self-Alienation combined with the realization that they can never cast off their Indian physical traits and cultural habits reaffirm their sense of Indian identity. To combat the feeling of self alienation they are drawn toward their ethnic communities where they experience intense personal feelings and realization of their Indian identities. They have successfully maintained Gurudwaras, Ashrams and Temples in every big city and town in America. (Bharati Mukherjee’s Fiction 15)
Being an immigrant herself Bharati Mukherjee feels very comfortable in dealing with the immigrants’ life. Beena Agarwal opines, “Bharati Mukherjee with her peculiar sensibility for the cross cultural crisis in the era of globalization endeavored to dive deep in to the distorted psyche of those immigrants who had been surviving in the conflict of traditional Indian values, inherent in their personality and their fascination for their western mode of living that they had driven out of their professional compulsions or for their urge to achieve greater freedom in liberal and dynamic society of India” (“Cross Cultural Dilemma” 271).

Most of the protagonists of Mukherjee suffer intolerably as they are unable to adjust to the new culture and environment. Although the theme of the capturing Indian emigrant experience in America pervades in almost all of her novels and short stories, her main focus is on her women characters, their struggle for identity, their bitter experiences and their final emergence as self-assertive individuals free from the bondages imposed on them by the traditional Indian customs. In an interview to Bill Moyers Bharati Mukherjee has said that the immigrants should violently murder their former selves upon coming to the US. Therefore her women protagonists who are immigrants undergo a transformation from their former selves in the host country. Bharati
Mukherjee’s heroines shed their past life and take a new self once they cross the borders of their native country. They undergo many trials while transforming themselves into a new being. They suffer several mental ailments while shedding off their past. As Madhusudhan Prasad puts it, “Another remarkable literary phenomenon in post-independence fiction is the development of the existentialist novel displaying a shift of emphasis from the external to the internal, the outer to the inner, etching the contours of the interior landscape of the individuals mind” (Some Post-Independence Indian English Novelists” 219).

Her main theme throughout her writing discusses the condition of Asian immigrants in North America, with particular attention to the changes taking place in South Asian women in the New World. Shilpa Shukla and Niroj Banerji opine:

Bharati Mukherjee is an investigating pioneer of innovative terrains, practices, and literatures that co-exist with her wide ranging mission to discover new worlds. Bharati Mukherjee’s foremost concern as a post-modern writer has been the life of South Asian expatriates and dilemma of acculturation and assimilation. Acculturation is the depressing upshot of post-modern scenario which Mukherjee had comprehended
much early. Mukherjee’s characters are 
autobiographical portraits of her interpretation 
and reaction of her experience as an expatriate 
in Canada which was a cultural and psychological 
mongrelization and her mounting identification 
of the self as immigrant nobody in America. 
("The Theme of Alienation and Assimilation" 20)

Bharati Mukherjee’s protagonists are her replicas. By 
presenting their trials and tribulations Bharati Mukherjee 
presents the problems faced by her and other such south 
Asian immigrants.

The Tiger’s Daughter is the first novel of Bharati 
Mukherjee and is considered to be the most elegant novel 
of her. In an interview to Sybil Steinberg she has said 
“It is the wisest of my novels in the sense I was between 
both worlds. I was detached enough from India so that I 
could look back with affection and irony, but didn’t know 
America long enough to feel any conflict. I was like a 
bridge poised between two worlds” (Bharati Mukherjee 46- 
47). Bharati Mukherjee is an expert in expatriate writing. 
Most of her protagonists are women migrants, who have 
settled in the US for their betterment. In the New Land 
they try to assimilate the alien culture overthrowing 
their Indian heritage. This cultural clash creates a 
tension in the mind of the immigrant and she is always 
alienated. Ananda Prabha observes, “conquering the
new feeling of nostalgia, he carves out a new territory and wraps himself totally with the lure of the west. He recreates himself into a new personality and forms emotional ties with the place he lives in. This discovery of a new self slowly makes him forget his own native culture. On his return to his native land he finds that his native taste and touch have turned alien to him. His mind is again torn between the cultural clash of two environments and he is forced to fight with his split personality” (“Bharati Mukherjee and the Immigrant Psyche” 53).

The Tiger’s Daughter, the first novel of Bharati Mukherjee is often discussed as an auto-biographical novel, since in this novel the protagonist too, like the author marries an American and settles in the US. After a prolonged stay in the States she returns back to her country with eagerness but she is disappointed to the core. The protagonist of the novel is Tara Banerjee Cartwright who is born and bred in a high class Brahmin family. Her father is known as the Bengal tiger. Tara is convent-educated and as she completes her schooling she is sent to Vassar in America to pursue her higher studies. She has certain initial bitter experiences as a student in Vassar. Shobha Shinde rightly observes, “The tremendous difference between two ways of life leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be
called a cultural shock. When a person leaves his own
culture and enters another his old values come into
conflict with the new one he finds” (“Cross Cultural
Crisis” 47). Being an immigrant away from home she had
many nostalgic memories of her country. She was compelled
to have her higher education at Poughkeepsie by her father
who was afraid of the changing political turmoil’s in
Calcutta. But the sensitive and home sick Tara suffered a
lot in the new land at a very tender age of fifteen. She
sensed discrimination every now and then among her
roommates even when they did not share her mango chutney.
“Little things pained her. If her roommate did not share
her bottle of mango chutney she sensed discrimination.
Three weeks in Poughkeepsie and I’m undone thought Tara”
(TTD 11). She defended her family and country vehemently.
She prays to Kali to give her strength. She did not know
how to make them understand that she belonged to an upper
caste. Their racial discrimination was too much for the
young girl that she thought of getting back to India. But
the education she received from the Belgian nuns in her
convent detained her from doing so. She started to adjust
to her situation when one day she accidently met an
American with whom she fell headlong love which ended in a
sudden marriage. The man was David Cartwright and the
marriage was a successful one. Tara had many times dreamt
of visiting her country and her dream came into reality
only after seven years. Her fascination for her coming back home fails as soon as she lands India. She discovers that she no longer belonged to India and that she is no more at home in India than she was in America. She is not feeling at ease even when she is surrounded by her relatives talking in Bengali and who affectionately call her by her childhood name “Tultul.” Her discomfort only intensifies, “She had not remembered the Bombay relatives’ nickname for her. No one had called her Tultul in years” (TTD 17). While she was taken in to the streets of Bombay she remembers having admired the houses on marine drive. She had thought them fashionable, but now their shabbiness appalled her. Jasbir Jain opines “Tara’s consciousness of the present is rooted in her life in the States and when she looks at India anew it is not through her childhood associations or her past memories but through the eyes of her foreign husband David. Her reactions are those of a tourist or a foreigner” (“Foreignness of Spirit” 13).

Her two day journey from Bombay to Calcutta only incited her increasing horror. Though she had said to her relations that she could manage with the train journey, in truth she is terribly afraid of each and every one travelling along with her. The two male passengers who travelled with her set down the confidence level in Tara. “Her Bombay Aunty would have said all Marwaris are ugly frugal and vulgar and all Nepalis are Lecherous. Tara
hoped she had a greater sense of justice toward non-
Bengalis. But the gentleman in the compartment simply did
not interest her. The Marwari was indeed very ugly and
tiny and insolent. ... The Nepali was a fidgety old man with
course hair. ... Both men Tara decided could effortlessly
ruin her journey to Calcutta” (TTD 20).

Both the men vie for the attention of Tara. During
the journey Tara ordered for coke, poached egg, toast,
soup, carrots, and bread pudding. But she did not drink
the coke as the lid was open and as “Tara, still close to
David’s worries, feared diarrhea, jaundice and polluted
water” (TTD 21). She had thought that she’d love the train
journey but instead it only depressed her. She felt for
having come alone to India in a haste without the company
of David, mistaking her fear of New York as home sickness.
Tara arrives at the Calcutta station and she is taken
aback by the sights she sees in and around there. Tara
feels lonely in spite of a huge crowd of relatives had
come to receive her at the railway station. Nothing seemed
familiar everything was new to her. “For a moment she
thought she was going mad....Calcutta had already begun to
exert its darkness over her she thought” (TTD 28-30). The
only person who seemed to be a genuine person among that
crowd was her father, the Bengal Tiger Nagendra Kumar
rightly says “The new Americanized Tara fails to bring
back her old sense of perception and views India with the
keenness of a foreigner. Her entire outlook has changed” (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 31).

Though surrounded by friends and relations Tara felt herself alienated from others. She felt herself to be an other who could not mingle with them. Tara senses her alienation even in the company of her close friends of “Camac street friends.” They were the English speaking high class elite group of Calcutta. Though they always behaved like English men they did not approve Tara’s marriage to an American. They were the aristocratic group with whom Tara shares her feeling. But ironically enough their aristocratic oneness only intensifies her alienation. Her friends tell her that her being away in America had “eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature” (TTD 55). Tara’s sense of being an alien and an out caste among family and friends assumes monstrous proportions when her friends accuse her of abandoning her Brahmin caste by marrying an American who is construed a meleccha, outcaste. She has done a blunder which her friends and neighbors are not ready to accept. She becomes a secondary citizen in her own country and is unable to mingle with others wherever she goes. Moreover, the American woman residing inside her does not allow her to feel free with all. She is unable to tolerate the sights around her. Most of the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee are well to do Bengali girls who are brought up
in a well manner in Bengal and after marriage as in the case of Dimple in Wife and Tara Lata of Desirable Daughters or for pursuing higher studies as in the case of Tara Banerjee of The Tiger’s Daughter they move to the US. Emmanuel S. Nelson views:

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

She had reminiscences of her life in America at her father’s home. It is understood that she did not belong to America also. She was always under stress in America, and she longed for her return to India: New York she thought now to be exotic. Not because it had laundromats and subways. But because there were policemen with dogs prowling the underground tunnels. Because girls like her
at least almost like her, were being knifed in elevators in their own apartment buildings. Because students were rioting about campus recruiters and faraway wars rather than the price of rice or the stiffness of final exams. Because people were agitated over pollution ….New York was certainly extraordinary, and it had driven her to despair…” (TTD 34). She remembers those days when out of nostalgia she used to wash, iron and hung her silk scarves to make her apartment look Indian like.

When she returns to India after seven long years she is not the same Tara. She is the American wedded Tara Cartwright who perceives India in a different way as the westerners do. She is indirectly influenced by the Americans’ idea on India and Indians which is seen in many occasions. She believes her visit to India would relieve her from all such pains. But instead she suffers from the foreignness of spirit in India more acutely than she had in America. She is unable to find oneness with her own people. In her early days to India her mother takes her to Aunt Jharna’s home. Tara tries to sympathize with Aunt Jharna for her ailing child. But her aunt mistakes her sympathy and insults her. Tara feels to say, “I don’t hate you, and the miserable child, the crooked feet, the smoking incense holder, I love you” (38). She feels an alien even in the best company of her dear friends. Tara’s seven years of stay in Vassar America has changed her
outlook of life. She has starts to adjust to live a life in the American culture as she has married an American. So when she returns to India she is gripped by the “foreignness of spirit." She wonders about the foreignness of spirit that has gone into her and how does this foreignness of spirit begins. Tara discovers from self analysis that her several years severance from India alone would not have been the sole cause of her cultural alienation in India. The root cause should have begun in India itself “right in the centre of Calcutta with forty ruddy Belgian women, fat foreheads swelling under starched white head dresses long black habits intensifying the hostility of the Indian Sun? The nuns had taught her to inject the right degree of venom into words like common and vulgar. ... Did the foreignness drift inward with the winter chill at Vassar as she watched the New York snow settle over new architecture, blonde girls Protestant matrons and Johnny Mathis? (37).

She spends most of her time in Catelli Continental Hotel with her English speaking friends. There were many parties and dinners arranged to celebrate Tara’s coming back. In her early days she felt very comfortable with her friends. But gradually she felt that she was an outsider who did not belong to their group. “Her friends let slip their disapproval of her, they suggested their marriage
had been imprudent that the seven years abroad had eroded all that was fine and sensitive in her Bengali nature” (56). Tara’s friends irritated her with their lack of seriousness to her real problems. They were interested only to listen to “stories about America about Television and automobiles and frozen foods and record players” (56). Tara could find sea changes in her friends’ nature in these seven years. Pranob was a romantic dreamer when she left India. But now he was a serious industrialist, money-minded and ill-tempered in nature. Tara writes her experience to her husband every now and then but it was impossible for her to share all her experiences she gained in India. Tara could no longer visualize David’s face in its full entirety, only bits and pieces in precise detail came back in reminiscence which terrified her. While living in India she did not feel she had married a person but she had married a foreigner “and this foreignness was a burden” (62). Sitting in her father’s home she used to write to David and she felt it impossible to write to a foreigner that she loved him very much “surrounded by the Bengal tiger’s chairs tables flowers and portraits” (63).

Pronob, Nilima, and Reena were those friends with whom Tara spent most of her hours at the Catelli Continental Hotel. Pronob, the dreamer in his youth had turned out to be a fat, ill-tempered, money-minded, serious industrialist in seven years time. But all were
uniformly interested in listening to the American stories of Tara. "She described to them in detail how she spent a typical day in New York, what she ate for breakfast, how much the subway token cost, how she washed and hung her nylon over bath tub, what her thesis director looked like" (58). Though they were interested to know the lifestyle of America they hated the idea of living as an immigrant there. Pronob says, “I wouldn’t mind giving up the factory, but I’d hate to be a nobody in America” (59). Tara feels like losing her self-confidence by such comments even among friends.

One day while she was spending her day in an exhibition along with Sanjay, a friend of the PRESS, and with Pronob she happened to meet Mr. Tuntunwala a political personae with whom she travelled in the train from Bombay to Calcutta. Tara wondered at herself for following the man as she felt a strange liking for that man. She perhaps liked the too much energy in him. Tuntunwala was a clever politician who could easily take advantage of his position over her. Tara knew very well that Mr. Tuntunwala was a dangerous man. “He could create whatever situation, whatever catastrophe needed. It was no use criticizing him, Tara thought” (77-78).

Mr. Joyonto Roy Chowdhury introduced himself to Tara as her father’s friend. One day she along with Mr. Chowdhury drove to the funeral pyres on the river banks
and both had a long walk along the banks when suddenly a
man from the dark appeared before her and stretched his
palm before her. Tara, who had forgotten all the rituals
of India assumed that the man asked for “baksheesh” and
quickly gave him two rupees. But the man threw the rupee
away and asked her to show her palm. Tara was afraid of
his behavior and ran away from there. But Joyonto was calm
and he allowed the man to read his palm. The prolong stay
in the States had left Tara to be afraid of even ordinary
sights in India.

Another such incident happened in a picnic where Tara
went with her family and friends. Though everyone enjoyed
the picnic Tara seemed to be lonely and panic stricken.
She does not mingle with others. Everyone enjoy swimming
but Tara avoids telling that she does not know swimming.
That night everyone slept soundly except Tara. She alone
was the one who did not feel sleepy. She wakes up
disturbed and locates a water snake in the swimming pool
they had been swimming. She cries hysterically for help
waking others and creating in them that a great tragedy
has happened. Her family and friends wonder at her for
having shouted hysterically for a water snake. Even after
knowing it to be a water snake she behaves wildly. Even
her father who always supports his daughter says “I think
you don’t eat enough. That’s why you are nervous” (101).
Thus Tara is seen to take everything little thing very
serious that happens around her. At another incident Tara loses her mind and shouts on seeing a small girl suffering from leprosy. Though such diseases form a part and parcel of Indian life style Tara’s stay in the States has made her to look at them hostile. Like a foreigner she has started to look down at her own country as a land of poor people living in unhygienic conditions and suffering from starvation decay and disease.

Tara is alienated in her American set of connections and then alienated from her own roots. Her pain of alienation is evident not only in Canada and America but also in her own Bengal when she returns to India after seven years. Only after coming back to her own country she realizes that she neither belongs to America nor to India. To escape the realities of life she often goes to the Catelli Continental Hotel while in India where she could find an emotional escape. Tara is no longer a part of her family, who belong to an Old Bengal which is now lost to her, nor is she able to feel at ease with her friends, who in their different ways are as isolated as Tara. Her friends approve her foreign manners, foreign etiquette, and foreign fashion but as conservative racial purists they would never approve of her foreign marriage.

Caught between two worlds Tara had forgotten many of the rituals at worship. Infact she used to stand beside her mother during the pujah was performed since her early
childhood, but today she had forgotten the steps of the rituals during the prayers. The incident at Shiv puja alerts her about the loss of religious and own cultural heritage. "When the sandal wood paste had been ground Tara scraped it off the slimy stone tablet with her fingers and poured it into a small silver bowl. But she could not remember the next step of the ritual. It is not a simple loss, Tara feared, this forgetting of prescribed actions; it was little death, a hardening of the heart a cracking of axis and centre. But her mother comes quickly with relief of words" (51). Tara worries for having forgotten the basic rituals of praying God. Anita Myles, observes "Tara becomes foreign to her native values and is once again filled with the sense of alienation. She begins to question her own identity. America had certainly transformed Tara for she had now come to realize the gulf between the two worlds. There occurs a conflict in her mind between her old sense of perception and outlook while in India and now her changed outlook after her sojourn to America" (Feminism and Post Modern Indian Women Novelists 110).

During the Summer she visits Darjeeling along with her friends and family members as a holiday tour. She enjoys the beautiful Himalayas with its pure and chill air. But untoward incidents spoil her trip of Darjeeling. One day Tara, Pronob and Antonio (an American lady) went
around the observatory hill. On the way some of the young hooligans tease them which spoils Tara’s mood. Her trip to Darjeeling did not provide her peace but for the darshan of Kannanbala Mata. “Tara found herself shouting “Ma, Ma, Mata!” with the rest, she found it easy suddenly to love everyone” (TTD 173). But for the darshan of Mata she had very bitter experiences at Darjeeling. She was also insulted by one of the judges while she suggested something about the beauty contest organized by the hotel manager.

Tara plans a trip to Nayapur along with her whole group of friends. There she again meets the national personage Tuntunwala whom she had met many a times earlier. It is a wonder that Tara had a strange liking for this ugly Marwari. Tuntunwala proposes to show Nayapur to Tara and Tara agrees to the proposal. This meeting ends with the claustrophobic rape by this wretched politician. Tara who is supposed to stop his advances does not do it. This shows that she too is a party to the amorous game. But she is too sensitive to the incident that she is afraid to discuss it with anyone not even with her close friends. She realizes: “She could not share her knowledge of Tuntunwala with any of her friends. In a land where a friendly smile an accidental brush of the fingers can ignite rumours even lawsuits how is one to speak of Tuntunwala’s violence” (199).
When she realizes that India no longer yields her recognition, she decides to return to New York and books her flight ticket. But before she takes off to America she becomes a victim to violence. The violence started as the marchers proceeded from the Catelli Continental Hotel. At the end Joyonto Roy Chowdhury is beaten to death and Pronob gets injured in his attempts to save him. Tara’s end is mysterious as she still locked in a car across the street from Catelli Continental wondered whether she would ever get out of Calcutta and if does not whether David would ever know that she loved him fiercely. It is ironic that she survived in an immigrant country but becomes a victim of violence in her own nation. In Calcutta, Tara could no longer enjoy those happy olden days. Indeed the safe Calcutta that she had envisioned for herself in New York has now become the deadliest city now for Tara. The novel ends on the final symbolic image of Tara suspended in a state of terror and uncertainty. Locked in a car outside Catelli Continental Hotel she is surrounded by a mob of naxalites who have just killed Joyonto Choudhury and injured Pronob. As the narrative comes to a close Tara’s last thoughts are about “whether she would ever get out of Calcutta” (210). The novel has an open ending. It is left to the readers fantasy if the protagonist would survive the situation or not. Nagendra Kumar, observes “In a sense, the turmoil outside is but an external
manifestation of Tara's inner state of mind and by leaving her amidst that turmoil perhaps Mukherjee hints at the irreconcilability of such conflicts" (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 42).

Bharati Mukherjee's second novel Wife reveals the experience and fate of an immigrant wife who is uprooted and exiled from her culture and transplanted into an entirely alien culture. Though the novel deals with expatriate and diasporic experience it also emphasizes alienation and displacement. Expatriation and alienation are some of the recurring themes in the works of Bharati Mukherjee. Binda Sharma and G.A.Gyanshyam observe:

Bharati Mukherjee’s novels portray the traumas and tensions, probing and pining of the contemporary man through an exploration of the lacerated psyche of the characters. Isolated from the self as well as the society, Bharati’s characters are forlorn and lovelorn. They are obsessively and neurotically involved in the affairs of life that they fail to decide the tenor of their life. She grapples with the psychic moments of the psyche to unveil the hidden and mute motives and impulses behind the individuals' mental odyssey. Her novels are existential in tone for they deal with contradictions and predicaments faced by the
individuals in the struggle of life. ("Wife: A Study" 81)

Women are completely dependent and subordinate to someone since their birth. She is suppressed by her father in her childhood and youth, by her husband after marriage, and by her son in her old age and if she is an employee she is dominated by her male colleagues. Thus freedom is denied to the women of the Indian society. S. Prasanna Sree opines, “In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home maker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. She makes series of adjustments and yet is not an equal to man. This is the predicament of women all over the world” ("Inching Towards Freedom" 19). Wife deals with psychological claustrophobia and the resultant destructive tendencies of that condition in Dimple Das Gupta a young Bengali wife. F.A. Inamdar observes, “Dimple is a psychic study of an abnormal woman. She has nothing to do with the problems of immigrants. Therefore she angers her husband by making fun of his dress spilling curry on his shirt front. She goes to the extent of condemning the gifts he brings for her. Her abnormality reaches the climax when she skips her way to abortion” ("Man Woman Relationship" 69). Wife, as the very name suggests, is the story of a wife. The novel centres
on the character Dimple Mukherjee who develops an abnormal psyche and finally kills in the novel. The very name of the heroine Dimple – suggests a surface depression.

S.P. Swain writes:

To understand the reality of Dimple’s psyche one has to delve deep into the inner recesses of her mind, the intricate stirrings of her feelings. The word Dimple is quite symbolic, suggestive of beauty and to be more accurate ‘flawed beauty.’ The name Dimple is quite scintillating and enticing but lexicographically it means any slight surface depression. This depression on the surface is again symbolic of the depression within her psyche which is borne out by her irritable responses to the things around her.

(“Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife” 118-19)

The author symbolically expresses the psychic depression of her protagonist from her name itself. Dimple Das Gupta comes from a well to do family of Calcutta. Like any girl of her age, she too is much particular of getting married and living a luxurious life. Indian culture nurtures a feeling among the young Indian girls that marriage is their only doorway to happiness. Parents of Indian children give only little freedom, to their daughters and so they long to taste the fruit of freedom, at least after marriage. Dimple is no exception. She
imagines that “marriage would free her life, fill her with passion” (W 13). She had dreams that marriage would “bring her freedom, cock tail parties on carpeted lawns, fund raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love” (3). She was always brooding over a luxurious married life like living in “an apartment in Chowringee, her hair done by a Chinese girl, trips to new market for nylon sarees” (3). Reading novels and film magazines has made her too romantic and frivolous leading her to negation of the hard realities of life. Dimple has wanted a different life altogether. The craving for affluence is her psychic need and a direct consequence of her middle-class background. Her psychic obsessions are about the inadequacies of her figure and complexion. She is very conscious that she is not good looking. So she seeks advice from beauty to develop her bust.

She is on the verge of obsession owing to her excessive eagerness, anxiety, and intense desire to get married. Dimple’s choice is to marry a neurosurgeon who could give her a sophisticated life. She believes a doctor alone could satisfy her material needs. But her father could find her only an engineer. He is the young ambitious engineer Amit Basu. However, Dimple is happy as Amit has plans to settle in America. The period that Dimple is awaiting a husband at her father’s home is amusing and pathetic at the same time. She rejoices when her parents
have found her a boy thinking that her desperate days are over and thereafter she could lead a happy and sophisticated high style life. But Dimple does not seem to be normal from the beginning. She clearly suffers from a psychic disorder which is clear from her behavior all along. She is basically an abnormal person whose abnormality has driven to extremity due to her immigrant problem. S.Indira opines, "Bharati Mukherjee presents the world of Dimple, a world of day dreams and night mares and her morbid psyche through a series of grotesque images. Dimple’s morbidity is evident while she is still at her parental home, in the way she allows her conscious mind to be completely dominated by the colourful romance projected in the advertisements and stories of magazines. Indulging herself in sexual fantasies with cricket stars, young cabinet ministers and heroes from novels, Dimple sets out on a long journey of unreal meaningless and morbid existence (“Splintered Self” 101).

Dimple who dreamed to live a sophisticated life in a well-furnished apartment, receives the first shock when she finds that her husband’s home is an apartment in a dingy building on the top floor of a three-storied apartment. She is more shocked when she understands that her mother-in-law and sister-in-law do not have any liking for her. Her mother-in-law makes it clear that she admitted the marriage only for the handsome dowry she
received from Dimple’s side. Dimple is very meek in her early days in her in-law’s home that she submits to all their whims and fancies. She does not protest even when Amit’s mother decides to change her name to Nandini since Dimple was “...too frivolous and unBengali...” (W 14). Her change of name is her first estrangement from her identity. She feels that Nandhini does not suit her. But neither her husband nor her best friend Pixie were able to realize her feelings. To Amit, the change of her name was “a small thing” but to Dimple it meant everything. Her friend Pixie advises her to win over her mother-in-law’s love instead of worrying for such petty matters. Dimple, though feeling uncomfortable, adjusts to such familial situations. It is all because she believes that one day she would leave Calcutta and go to America with her husband all alone and her new life would begin. This thinking makes her adjust to the slavish life in her in-laws family. The freedom that this ignorant girl craves for is freedom in modern vulgar sense oblivious to its deeper meanings. It is not very soon before Dimple realizes that Amit is not the man of her dreams. But being a married Indian woman she had no other option rather than to love the man she has married. Her only dreams now were to leave India to America, but Amit’s delay in getting a job abroad frustrates her. Her sense of dissatisfaction at her in-law’s home, Amit’s delay to go abroad, and all
other such disappointments irritate Dimple and there is a psychological shift in her.

In her life at Calcutta, soon after marriage, Dimple becomes pregnant, which she sees as a hurdle to her new beginning. "She began to think of the baby as unfinished business. It cluttered up the preparation for going abroad. She did not want to carry any relics from her old life: given another chance she could be more exciting person, take evening class, and perhaps become a librarian. She had heard that many Indian wives in the States become librarians" (W 42). Preparing to leave for America Dimple induces miscarriage by skipping rope until her legs are numb. This act of Dimple is something a terrible one as women of India are constantly brought up by being insisted that giving birth to children and rearing them up is their prime duty. Moreover she is not giving any afterthought for the cruel action she has committed. She remains cool and dispassionate while it should have led her to an emotional upheaval. It is supposed that pregnancy is a boon for Indian women as they are the very source of creation. If a woman is unable to give birth to a child she is condemned and ridiculed in the Indian society. But Dimple acts in a very different way. She is also seen killing a mice which she considers to be pregnant. She behaves in a highly hysteric manner in killing the mice for no reason. It seems that this young
Indian girl wants to liberate herself from the traditional roles of an Indian wife and wants to establish her will. Nagendra Kumar, observes, "This act of killing is a manifestation of violence smoldering inside her. Her repulsion with her own pregnancy is born out of her hatred for Amit who fails to feed her fantasy world" (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 45). In Dimple’s initial expectations of a change in her marriage status and in anticipation of new experiences in the United States, Mukherjee indicates the dilemma of the Indian women whose social role, by tradition is defined by a patriarchally encoded culture. S. Prasanna Sree rightly observes:

Indian woman has carried the burden of the family. She is a slave for her husband, for her children and for her family. Through the centuries woman in Hindu tradition is depicted as a silent sufferer, she has been given a secondary status both in the family and the society. From time immemorial, attempts were made to redefine her identity in relation to man as mother, daughter, sister but traditional trains a woman to think herself as an inferior being. ("Inching Towards Freedom" 18)

Bereft of Indian values, Dimple lands on the land of promise with her dreams and aspirations. In spite of possessing an adventurous spirit, Dimple gets baffled by
the exposure to American culture. The topics of conversation among Indian society were invariably on the Indians ‘ individual and collective expectations of “making it in America” and on the drawbacks of living in the US: the high crime in the streets of New York, the cost of buying groceries the reasons for not getting to know the Americans etc.. Jyoti Sen, Amit’s friend, always talked about the violence that occurs in America every now and then. All his speeches showing America as a violence-prone country terrified Dimple. On the first day while receiving and taking them to his apartment he says “Here... if you honk your horn at some guy he’s likely to blow your head off” (W 52). Amit and Dimple had to leave India in a hurry to avoid a problem in Amit’s office. So they get into America even before Amit finds a job in the new world. They are helped by Jyoti and Meena Sen in whose home they find a place. Nagendra Kumar views, “The Sens’ disgust with America and English language is quite in keeping with the feeling of insecurity in an expatriate. People raised in an entirely different social milieu and cultural atmosphere can hardly shed off their cherished values for one they are forced to adopt out of necessity ... for them the country of adoption is a temporary abode and they try to pass their time preserving their own identity and upholding their own cultural and religious values” (47-48).
The next day when Dimple went for an outing with Meena Sen, she was encouraged by Meena to go for herself to buy her favorite cheesecake. She went into a shop and asked for the same. But the shopman stared at her and asked if she does not know the law of the country. Saying so, he withdrew his drawer in search of something which Dimple assumed to be a gun. She came to the conclusion that she had insulted the man in asking for a cheesecake and he, in anger, is searching for his gun to shoot her. Dimple ran away from the store having her eyes closed and hands covering her mouth and nostrils. She thought it to be a great escape. She realizes the differences between Calcutta and New York. 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 cheesecake. Dimple is terrified at the shop owner’s response and feels that she will pay for her imperfect English and cultural ignorance by being shot on the spot. She perceives her venturing into America proper as being met with the penalty of death as warned by Meena Sen. Such incidents made Dimple “collapse inwardly.” “Significantly Dimple’s problem does not lie outside her. She would remain a foreigner wherever she is to go. Her problem lies within her. She suffers from a psychic disorder as is clear from her behavior all along” (5). She experiences both her own and borrowed cultures: the self controlled
domestic world of the Indians in Queens and the sophisticated parties of the more expensive and Americanized Indians in Manhattan.

Dimple tries to convey her fears to Amit but neither does he try to understand nor is he capable to rising above a mundane understanding. She finds herself trapped in a dilemma of tension between the American culture and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife: between a feminist desire to be assertive and the Indian demand to be submissive. Nagendra Kumar observes, “America has outwitted her and she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia … her whole world is limited to the four walls of the apartment and media becomes her only friend” (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 52). Uprooted from the solidity of her Bengal home and planed down in the hectic liberal yet impersonal world of America, Dimple undergoes psychological fragmentation resulting from the clash of cultures and the disparity between aspiration and reality. In the first stage of immigration, the first concern of the immigrant is shelter and job. Without an occupation for her husband and address for themselves Dimple experiences the pangs of rootlessness and identity crisis. Usha Bande observes “The American experience is unsettling for her with boredom, distrust of the
entire system fear of people and a kind of philosophical detachment. She loses her sense of balance and sense of reality and succumbs to neurosis. This process is quintessentially not self referential nor is it rooted in the tension between a past lost and a current state of displacement. In fact it manifests through the fictional movement exemplified by the journey across the uncharted inferior world" ("Recasting Dimple in Wife" 127).

The couple does not live happily owing to their poor economic conditions. For four months Amit does not get a job. She, who had believed would be free to experience a life different and distanced from that which she had left behind in India, finds her existence in a nebulous, undefined social space that paradoxically reinforces her indigenous cultural moorings. She is most reminded of Indianness among “Americanized Indians” (W 77). Marginalized by the patriarchy of the Indian culture Dimple is equally in troubles in her adopted culture. While meeting Indian friends Dimple is awed by their fancy talk and social behaviors. It was so untypical of the Indians at Calcutta that they did not speak anything about communalism and petty feelings. One day Dimple and her husband, along with the Sens’ attended a party arranged by a prosperous Indian businessman Vinod Khanna. He was ready to offer a job to Dimple which she declines as per her
husband’s advice. Amit, the typical Indian husband, doubts the genuineness in Vinod Khanna’s offer. This is because sexism in America appears very disastrous. Ina Mullick and Bijoy Mullick are sheer evidences of this spoilt culture. Dimple, at another Indian party is introduced to Ina Mullick a “liberated house wife who is more American than Americans” (68). Dimple is awed by her living style, her command of English and everything that is American in her. When Ina offers Gin, Dimple feels that Amit was waiting for her to give the right answer. It was up to Dimple to uphold her Bengali womanhood, marriage, and male pride. “If she took a drink she knew Amit would write it to his mother and his mother would call the Das Guptas and accuse them of raising an immoral, drunken daughter. The Calcutta rumour mill operated as effectively from New York as it did from Park street” (78). Dimple takes for granted the social circle of American Indians as cultural experience. It prevented her from experiencing life on the outside that would have indeed shaped up her view of American society.

However, Dimple’s analysis of her earliest encounter with American society is from the perspective of her own cultural moorings. Dimple thinks that, “in Calcutta she’d buy from Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis. She was used to many races. She’d never been a communalist...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 morning in America” (60). Her failed attempt at negotiating the cultural divide reiterates Dimple’s inability to find her space within the confines of an alien culture. Nagendra Kumar opines, “Her confusion with the names of 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 because she sees herself with the eyes of Ina Mullick. America underscores Dimple’s inferiority and she contemplates of bringing an end to this torturous existence” (The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee 51). She can neither negotiate the cultural barrier nor find a voice that speaks for her that discloses meaning for her in the chaos of her experience.

Dimple’s inability to express her feelings and thoughts make her culturally and linguistically silent. “Her English had grown less confident since she’d arrived in America” (W 74). Her inability to respond to Ina iterates her insular life and even her fears. She reacts to her environment in a manner as instinctive and predictable as to be labeled a tropism. Denied expression Dimple is unable either to validate her experience or her identity. She experiences total estrangement from herself and her surroundings as well. She finds a wide gulf between her fantasy world and the reality of her
situation. She sinks into a world of isolation and alienation. Usha Bande opines:

Since Dimple does not belong anywhere she loses her sense of security. Her real self is pushed to the background. Initially, after marriage, when living in Calcutta she tried to see herself as a different being, not like the Basus, just to keep her identity as a separate and unique being. In the U.S.A. she tries never to be Americanized. Instead she engages herself in search for glory by promoting her Indianness. It is a compulsive drive and would have cracked up any moment had not Amit been near her. It is wrong to surmise that she wants to remain an Indian to please Amit instead it is her own compulsions because she wants to be different. Thus increasingly she becomes a dissociated personality. ("Recasting Dimple in Wife" 129).

Dimple fails to strike a balance between the two juxtaposed worlds: the one she left behind and the other she comes to live in.

Dimple hates Amit as he is not the man of her dreams. She is alienated from Amit who as a careerist hankering after lucrative jobs. Frustrated and dejected Dimple leads an alienated life. Usha Bande observes, "The Safest way out of the trap is withdrawal. Dimple has no inclination
to go out. So she loses herself in sleep. Nineteen out of twenty-four hours she is sleeping. This saves her from interacting with Amit. She has no zest for life, or for living. Murder, suicide, violence haunt her constantly. She develops nightmares and insomnia. She is gripped by inertia and accompanying aversion to regular work. Inertia bears within itself the danger of deterioration" (131). Her world became watching TV and reading newspaper. Through media she is introduced to violence. Binda Sharma and G.A. Ghyanshyam observe, “Glued to T.V. and stunned by the incredible violence she is trapped in a diabolical trap a forwent without a hope of either release or relief. The violence ridden city of New York does her no good either. The neurosis arises from the clash between a requirement for adaptation and the individual inability to meet the challenge” (“Wife: A Study” 83). There were frequent announcements of murders in newspapers car radios and in casual conversations. Talking about murder in America was like talking about weather. She contemplates violence and killing. Naturally Dimple had a tendency for violence as we see her killing a rodent and aborting herself by violent means. She hears that an American lady divorced her husband for snoring. The American T.V. displayed more sex and violence. So Mukherjee writes, “the women on television led complicated lives become pregnant frequently and under suspicious circumstances murdered
were brought to trial and released: they suffered through their ping-pong volley of their fates with courage" (W 73). Many more such news corrupted the traditional and cultural moorings of Dimple. Dimple suffers in a dilemma between American culture and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife. It is quite evident that media, in many forms, played a great role in leading Dimple to murder Amit. Amit remains ignorant of all Dimple’s psychological ailments—such as her immoderate day time sleeping, her night mares and her indecisiveness etc. Dimple fights with her psychological problems all alone. 

Koren Horney observes:

The reaction to the deteriorating process can also be stark. And considering the formidable danger of self destructiveness this reaction is completely adequate as long as one continues to feel a helpless prey to these merciless forces. In dreams and associations they may appear in many succinct symbols such as a homicidal maniac Dracula, monsters, a white whale, or ghosts. This terror is the nucleus of many fears otherwise inexplicable such as the fear of the unknown and of the dangerous depth of the fear, fear of ghosts of anything mysterious. (Neurosis and Human Growth 153)
She turns towards Ina, Lenii, and ultimately Milt Glasser in her moment of crisis. But Ina and Lenii fail her as friends. Her relationship with Milt only furthered her psychological problems. Now the rebel in her starts devising new means and ways to commit suicide. Binda Sharma and G.A. Ghanshyam rightly observe, “Isolated, lonely and unable to communicate with others we find Dimple obsessively thinking about ‘Death’ which for her is the final and logical goal” (“Wife: A Study” 82).

There occurs a great cleavage in the communication between husband and wife which affects a happy married life. The breach widens day by day and ultimately ruins their relationship. But Amit seems to have understood her psychological problems a little when he says “You used to be a lot of fun; you used to pester me to take you out and get a pizza or a goucho pie; you know, do things. But now you just want to stay at home and you don’t even watch television. What’s wrong, for god’s sake? (W 176). But Dimple has drifted far away from Amit psychologically and does not properly respond leaving him baffled. Amit believes that providing material comfort alone is a husband’s duty. After he gets a job and they move to Marsha’s apartment, their economic conditions improve but they feel lonely. Amit could manage it easily as he gets out early and comes tired after a whole days work. He spends the rest of his evening time watching TV and
reading newspaper. "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" (113). It is Dimple who suffers. America has outwitted her and now she is gripped by a sense of nostalgia. It is beyond her understanding "how could she live in a country where every other women is a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule even in an elevator (112). She finds life impossible with people who could not understand Durga pujah. "If she were to stand in the lobby and say to the first ten people she saw 'Do you know it's almost October and Durga Pujah is coming? They would think she was mad. She could not live with people who didn't understand about Durga Pujah" (114).

She realizes how easy it was to communicate and to share with people in Calcutta. She never felt frightened at the sight of policeman whose faces were so friendly but the scene has changed so completely in the new country. Now 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 mistaken for a Puerto Rican. She does not want to lose her identity but feels isolated, trapped, alienated, and marginalized. She is completely disgusted with the American English and
American system. She believes she could not manage with even small things like operating the elevator. To avoid such dilemmas she has to live within the four walls of the apartment. She indulges in a sense of nostalgia thinking about her peaceful life in Calcutta with her friends. She is unable to share her innermost sufferings even to her husband. She had the company of Meena Sen at the Queens but at the Marsha’s she was all alone. Even after Pixie contacted her she was unable to write to her though at many a times she begins her letter in imagination. Later, she drops the idea thinking “friendship was impossible through letters” (W 120). Anita Myles observes, “The novelist delineates Dimple as a languid and irresolute women lacking in zeal, suffering acutely from a sense of insecurity and self pity. Her paranoia due to cacophony between expectation and reality results in dangerous hallucinations. Nevertheless, Dimple makes series efforts to get out of this psychological plight though her endeavours tend to be morally incorrect with recourse to extramarital indulgence seeking steadfastness” (“Progression from Feminine to Female” 310-11).

In order to cope with her alienation, Dimple starts searching for alternatives including attending and throwing parties and serving food in a glamorous way. She is tempted to roam in markets. She loves to go out with Ina Mullick to the restaurants for pizza-eating. Watching
TV and reading magazines become her favorite past time. She thinks of TV as her only friend. She loves having friends dropping in and makes it a point to organize social gatherings at home and be a good host too. In fact, her brief sexual encounter with Milt Marsha’s brother is due to her alienated experience. She likes him and trusts him. She feels him to be more accessible and friendly rather than the Indians such as Ina Mullick. In Milt’s company she feels that New York became as safe and simple as any other locality in Calcutta. She is unperturbed by any sense of guilt at her infidelity, an indication of her drifting away from her inherited cultures and its values and the distance her psyche has travelled. Dimple has committed the ultimate sin of betraying Indian culture. After her sexual encounter with Milt she becomes more and more isolated and her despair becomes more acute. She is trapped in a dilemma of tension between American culture and the traditional cultural constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist desire to be assertive and independent and the Indian need to be assertive and self-effacing. Mitali P. Wong and Zia Hasan opine:

At the centre of Dimple’s dilemma is the conflict between her need to find herself and the role of the good Hindu Wife, Sita of Ramayana which the Hindu Indian culture has imposed on her. Dimple’s conflict is inward as
well as outward. On the outside we see Dimple’s eventual reflection of her two possible role model for immigrant women. One is Meena Sen who clings to the Asian way of life so fiercely in New York that white Americans are not permitted inside her apartment. The other extreme is Ina Mullick a bitterly unhappy Bengali wife who wears pant and a shirt that exposes her naval. She chain smokes and is attending night school. Ina is ridiculed by the expatriate Indian community. (The Fiction of South Asians 53)

To add to her problems is her nature to compare herself with her bosom friend Pixie who was an anchor in the all India Radio. Dimple thought it to be very attractive and glamorous job. While in U.S. she compares herself with Ina Mullick whose life style, sense of liberty and flirtations made Dimple to envy her. Her dissatisfaction in life leads to comparisons and her comparisons lead to depression and other such mental ailments including hallucination insomnia, etc. Sometimes she has hallucinatory fear of burglars breaking into their flat, raping her, and murdering her. She also imagines pests like roaches nibbling her closet. “Insomnia was what she feared most. Between two and four in the morning she thought she heard men putting keys in the front door and roaches scuttling in the closet. In those waking
nightmares the men had baby faces and hooded eyes” (W 97).

Her mind is saturated with bizarre imaginations. She thinks of multiple ways to die. To Dimple death appears in myriad forms. Her imagination finds out nine different ways to die like setting fire on sari, cut the wrist with open glass, starve, fall on bread knives, etc., Later she transfers the blame of her suffering on her husband and decides to murder him. Then her imagination travels in the different ways of murdering him whether to kill him in sleep or at breakfast table. T. Sarada opines, “She suffers both from eros and thanobas complex. Dimple Transcends more cultural shock and embraces existential angst” (“Marriage: A Boon or Bane” 60).

Amit remains unaware of all the mental ailments Dimple is struggling with. He has no time for her and she feels that her marriage has betrayed her and had not provided her all the glittery things she imagined. Amit fails to feed her fantasy and merely provides her the small material comfort thinking that it is alone the duty of a husband. It is essential to study the character of Amit to get a better understanding of Dimple’s problems. He is a typical Indian male having dreams and aspirations to move higher in the social ladder. He believed that providing material comfort to his family is the only duty of a male and that it would and should make a wife happy.

Binda Sharma and G.A. Ghyanshyam opine, “Cautious and
meticulous he is the very embodiment of the Indian male, paradoxical, who would advocate of female education but is lacking in complementary progressive attitude to accept and digest the awareness and changed ideas of their womenfolk regarding their place and position in family and society” (“Wife: A Study” 82).

The alien circumstances accentuate her hypertension and drive her to the brink of regression and abnormality. She had shown potential signs of alienation in Calcutta before embarking on her voyage to America and now the Alien environment proves to be inexplorable. “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 expected inertia exhaustion endless indecisiveness” (W 115). As a result she finds herself ill at all odds and suffers from lonely existence in America. “Her own body seemed curiously alien to her filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt yet weightless almost airborne” (117). She has already been in a sick state of mind ever since she left India but the alienation from her husband, environment, futility, and meaninglessness of American life drive her to the fits of psychic depression and ultimate insanity. In this state of psychological drift
she hits herself upon the idea of violence against herself and Amit. She is constantly hitting upon new ways of committing suicide or killing Amit though she never considers murder seriously. Instead of becoming self destructive we see her gradually shifting the blame upon her husband.

The latest propensity for violence in her Calcutta days is her killing the rat in her husband’s house and her skipping rope to kill the fetus in her womb. This suppressed violence in her is brought out and activated in the new country’s alienated environment. Her desperation and alienation lead her to the extent of murdering her husband with a kitchen knife. “She sneaked upon 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 delectable spot, then she brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed the magical circle once, twice, seven times each time a little harder until the milk with the bowl of cereal was a pretty pink and the flakes were mushy...” (W 212). She does not feel guilty in murdering him instead a rare feeling of becoming an American possesses her after the murder. She
thinks that talking about murder in America was like talking about weather. The constant news report about murder in and around reduces her sense of guilt in committing murder. Her imagination stretches further until she visualizes her husband’s head as an artifact to be displayed in the drawing room. S.P. Swain argues:

A lacerated and anguished Dimple like Tara is the nowhere woman. She is neither of India nor of America but a stunned wanderer between these two worlds yet to attain a distinct identity. 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 release herself from the hallucinatory world, she is yet to get from the schizophrenic self. A waylaid traveler she is yet to reach her destination and carve out a niche for herself. Her quest is a quest for a voice a quest for identity. (“Dimple in Bharati Mukherjee’s Wife” 126)

*Wife* concludes with Dimple imagining Amits partially severed head on the dining table, as she reverts to watching television musing of the head: “I wonder if Lenii can make a base for it. She is supposed to be very clever with her fingers” (W 213). Dimple’s act which loudly signals her alienated self is both a falsification and an affirmation of her understanding of life in America just
as the television to which she is addicted reflects and recreates its own reality. Nandini Sahu opines, Dimple Das Gupta, "A typical Indian wife and an imaginative and romantic individual turn into "helpless and old" "sick" "furious" "desperate" murderer. Her dissatisfaction mixed with passive, inner complaints, her conventional thinking and unconventional desires juxtaposed to each other, and her vain attempts to preserve a traditional life style and to embrace the open frank life style of America at one and the same time, lead to a traumatic upheaval inside her. This renders her an insomniac, guilt ridden wife, a silent conspirer and finally a stunning murderer" (The Post colonial Space 6).

Mukherjee suggests that Dimple’s loss of sanity may be attributed to her sense of alienation from her own and American culture. Dimple’s sense of loss is heightened by her seduction of Marsha’s brother. She thinks it to be a moral lapse in her part as a wife. Her sense of her own subservience reiterates her marginality, which is compounded by her continuing frustration in adjusting to her new environment and new experiences. Dimple is a psychic study of an abnormal woman - her psychic defect is implied in her very name. Significantly the author had given the meaning of the word taken from the Oxford English Dictionary: Dimple any slight surface depression, with this psychic defect she naturally reacts in a peevish way to all
things around her. Myles, Anita views, "Dimple’s portrayal reveals cultural shock due to uncertainty whether to stick to the Indian tradition or to adopt the unlimited freedom of the American women. The novelist presents her as a prototype of all such first generation Indian women migrants to the west who develop incurable neurosis failing to determine any clear cut priority" ("Progression from Feminine to Female" 311).