

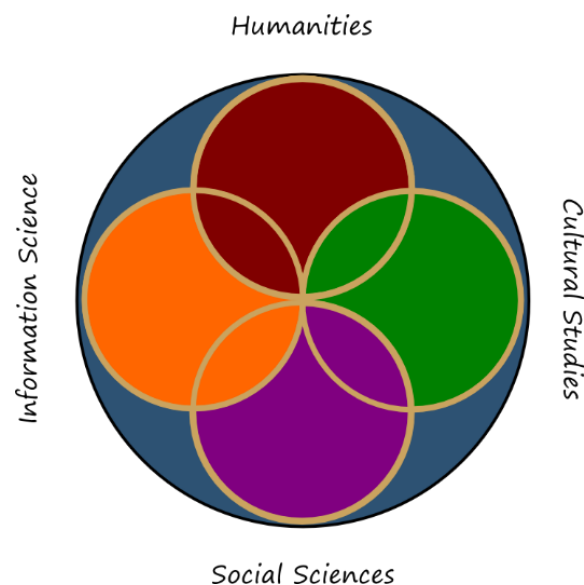
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## Psychological Alienation in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*

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### ABSTRACT

The psyche of Indian immigrants is the dominant concern of Bharati Mukherjee, who herself belongs to this class. Her main theme obviously refers to the phenomenon of migration and the problems like alienation, struggle with identity, racism and various forms of discrimination etc. This paper focus on the sense of alienation that Dimple, the protagonist of the novel *Wife* experience. This paper also reveals how Dimple, caught in a gulf between two contrasting worlds leads to her illusion, depression and at last her tragic decision of killing her husband. This novel *Wife* also concentrates on the experience of a woman forced to face her marginalization within her native culture. Bharati Mukherjee probes into the psyche of Dimple as she untolds her story from girlhood to her wifehood phase.

**Keywords:** *Alienation, Isolation, Suffering, Identity, Cultural Clash, etc.*

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**FULL PAPER**

India's contribution to world literature is really worth appreciating. Indian women writers have created a mark on the entire globe literary scene. Most of the women writers write concerning women as victims of violence, hypocrisy, exploitation and discrimination. Bharati Mukherjee a versatile Indian writer was born on twenty-seventh Gregorian calendar month 1940, during a Bengali Brahmin family of Kolkata. Her father was a pharmacologist and her mother, Bina Banerjee was a house woman. She is at her best when she draws on her experience of India while writing with insight about America in which, she now lives. Bharati Mukherjee is an immigrant author. She has modified citizenships and lived in varied cultural milieus with estranging rate. She has always been praised for her understanding prose style and her ironic plot developments and witty observation. She considers her work a celebration of her emotions, her herself a representative of the writers of Indian Diaspora.

Bharati Mukherjee much appreciated and renowned novel 'Wife' was written during the phase of alienation in Canada. This novel Wife falls into the category of the modern novel as it presents an intense inner world of neurotic and solipsistic individuals. Bharati Mukherjee chooses to glorify the alienated individuals. Immigrating to America offers her an escape from the constraints of traditionalism. Dimple initially believes that marriage would bring her liberty, parties on the carpet lawns, fund raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love. A twenty years old daughter of a well-to-do upper middle class Indian professional, Dimple engages herself in preparing for the great event. While her father is busy searching for the "ideal boy" in matrimonial ads. Dimple is worried about her imperfect figure. Dimple cares about her appearance because they are the pre-requisites to decide her future life and fate. Thus Dimple leaves no stone unturned to improve her looks through chicken soup, homeopathy pills, exercise and massages, but they are not helpful in enhancing her intractable body. She reads many magazines for becoming a life of glamour and affluence. She tried to look as a smart, handsome husband, preferably a neuro surgeon, who will provide her everything in life. The desire of Dimple is exhibited clearly as ....

"She wanted a different life -an-apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon sarees- So she placed her faith in neurosurgeons and architects".

After a long waiting, but painful waiting, she is finally married to Amit Kumar Basu, a young engineer, who has planned to go to America to make a good fortune and retiring to live a comfortable rich life in Kolkata. Dimple moves in with her mother-in-law, whom she loathes. The Indians have turned the mother into such basic symbol of authority. Both Mrs Basu and Mrs Ghose admit that the marriage of Amit and Dimple is a good match, but they make them point that Dimple Dasgupta is not their first choice. Her given name was a big issue, too. Mrs Basu does not like the name Dimple. She objects to it as she considers the name frivolous and unbengali. Thus Dimple is renaming as Nandini in Basu's family. Dimple soon becomes pregnant. Pregnancy changes Dimple's status in the Basu's family. The pregnancy is another challenging issue for Dimple. For the Basu's the unborn baby is communal property and they are solicitous of Dimple's health. They fasten Dimple who is a career of their next generation to certain rules; the rules are - "Do not carry heavy pails of water to the bathroom or kitchen; do not trip on dark staircase". She is not at all happy with her pregnancy. She feels to be burdened by it. Her swollen body is swelled violently with unvented hate which she sees an obstacle to her new beginnings:

She began to think of the body as unfinished business. It cluttered up the preparation for going abroad. She did not want to carry any relics from her old life; giving another chance she could be a more exciting person, taking evening classes perhaps, become a librarian. She had heard that many Indian wives in the states became librarians. It can be said that the prospect of becoming a mother enrages her. Because she feels motherhood will prevent her from enjoying the cozy life which she would get in a foreign country. Hence, she ruthlessly aborts her baby.

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, cover the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last drop of blood washed off her legs; then she collapsed". Its not like murder, Dimple said one afternoon, I could never commit murder. In Dimple's initial expectations of changed life in the United States, Mukherjee indicates the dilemma of the Indian woman whose social role, by tradition, is defined by a patriarchal encoded culture. Dimple is an object whose subjective self conforms to and is confirmed by male ideology and discourse. In the United States, Dimple experiences both her own and newly accepted cultures: "the self-contained domestic world of Indians in Queen and the sophisticated parties of the more expansive and Americanized Indians in Manhattan".

Dimple's experience with Indian Women in America has an alienating effect on her. The majority of these women continue to base their identities on their relatively privileged, class conscious attitudes towards social propriety, loyalty to one's roots and attachment to Hindu tradition. At first, Dimple seems to be familiar with their views on gender roles, women's place in the immigrant community and in the surroundings yet unknown American society. But soon they have become insufficient to her struggle between her old self-image and an immigrant placement where the middle-class social codes and gendered division of the private and the public are at the same time eagerly defended. The novelist describes how Dimple feels alienated when faced with the other women who accept motherhood and maintain a loyal and idealized view of India.

Pregnancy is a boon for Indian women because they are supposed to maintain the continuity of the clan. But Dimple is a singular in that "she thought of wanting to get rid of whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes. 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 she pounded and pounded the body 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 grey head".

Dimple thinks that marriage has robbed her of her romantic yearnings so tastefully nourished. Amit was not the man; Dimple had imagined for her husband. When she is out of the house, she starts creating the man of her dream: She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin the lips, eyes and chin from a body builder and shoulders and the stomach and legs from trousers and put the ideal man. While the passing of time the excitement of marriage diminishes and she becomes pregnant. A stage known for vomiting tendency; 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 blossom.....

All her sincere efforts to fit into the alien culture failed miserably. So she remains isolated and rootless in her dreamland. Amit had no job at the beginning. He searched the job everywhere, but of no use. Hence Amit felt miserable and developed complexities also and frustrated Dimple's happiness. Dimple feels that, "her life was slow, full of miscalculations". Her

frustration with Amit raises manifold. Dimple believes that “a man without a job was not a man at all”. The gap between the fanciful Dimple and the dejected Amit increased day by day. In the US Dimple’s sense of alienation further aggravated when Amit refused her suggestion of taking a part time job as a salesgirl in Vinod Khanna’s India Emporium. In a vile mood, Dimple shuts herself in the apartment and hates going out. She is completely isolated from the outside world. The thought of loneliness disintegrates her psychologically. With outmost disgust and neurosis, Dimple conceives the idea of violence against herself as well as Amit. The author writes: “Setting fire to a saree had been one of the seven types of suicide Dimple had recently devised”. At last, Amit succeeds in finding job as a boiler maintenance engineer and plans to stay in the apartment of Pradosh and Marsha Mukherjee, sister of Milt Glasser.

Dimple’s failure attempt at negotiating the cultural divide restates Dimple’s inability to find her “space’ within the limits of a foreign culture. That is, she can neither bargain the cultural barrier nor find a voice that answers to her needs, that speaks for her that discloses meaning for her in the chaos of her experience. Living in America for Dimple is like a tug of war. The shifting cultural values between tradition and modernity and between India and America engender Dimple’s transformations. She wishes to wear whit American sweaters and pants which are called normal dress in Ina’s point of view, but the saree, called normal dress makes her feel normal.

Dimple spends most of her time isolated from the world’s outside, reading Better Homes and Gardens and watching Television. From Television, Dimple “learned the details of American home life”. Little by little, American life distances Dimple from Amit, and then the Tv programme becomes her only friend who is “undemanding”. Dimple comes to know about Tv only on the day of her entrance at Sen’s apartment. She “had never seen Tv, she prayed that someone would turn it on”. Through this media, she is introduced to violence. She also heard a lot about murde. She also heard a lot about murder and violence in the newspapers, radio and in casual conversations. Talking about murders in America is like talking about the weather. Even the American cinemas display any endless violence and murder. Later on she is acquainted with Milt Glasser, brother of Marsha. The sanity and Indianans in Dimple starts eroding, after her relationship with Ina and Milt. Milt Glassers frequent visit to her room changed Dimple . Since Dimple is dandling between the Indian and American culture, she feels guilty of her extra marital relationship with Milt and worries about hiding the matter from her husband. This relationship made Dimple to break all the cultural, class and familial norms. She takes the drastic steps to murder her husband,

Amit. So one night she take the knife from the kitchen and comes very close to him and thus she punished her inattentive husband for his lapses and ends up her disharmonious marital life. She kills Amit to feel very American, almost like a character in a Tv serial murdering Amit symbolizes a way for Dimple to get rid of Indian values.

### Conclusion

In this way the novel *Wife* deals with the theme of alienation. It shows how the protagonists dream turn into a nightmare. Dimple, the protagonist hails from a middle-class family. She felt marriage would bring her freedom, happiness, and love. But she worried about her figure. Her deep hatred about her body and efforts to improve brought her frustration. Finally she murdered her husband Amit and terminated her pregnancy by self abortion before going to America as she felt pregnancy would be a hurdle in their new life.

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