



Dimple Das Gupta in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*: A Cultural Hybrid

Dr. Muhd. Mustafizur Rahman¹

Associate Professor, Department of English
Bangladesh Army University of Engineering & Technology
Qadirabad Cantonment, Natore-6431, Bangladesh

Email: mustafizsiu@yahoo.com

Mostak Hossain^{2*}

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Bangladesh Army University of Engineering & Technology
Qadirabad Cantonment, Natore-6431, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author Email: mostak024@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i5.2755>

APA Citation: Rahman, M. M. M., & Hossain, M. (2026). Dimple Das Gupta in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*: A Cultural Hybrid. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 8(5).283-293. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v8i5.2755>

Received:

24/06/2026

Accepted:

08/08/2026

Keywords:

Cultural hybridity, identity crisis, diaspora literature, immigrant women, third space

Abstract

This paper explores the theme of cultural hybridity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*, focusing on the tragic journey of Dimple Das Gupta, a first-generation Indian immigrant in the United States. Drawing upon Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory of hybridity and the "third space," the study examines Dimple's cultural dislocation, identity crisis, and failed attempts at assimilation in an alien land. While many diaspora protagonists in Mukherjee's works strive to forge new identities through acculturation, Dimple resists cultural transformation, clinging instead to her native Bengali values and traditional expectations. The novel reflects the psychological and cultural conflict that arises when immigrant identities are caught between two opposing cultural systems. Dimple's narrative represents a complex portrayal of female subjectivity, trapped in a liminal space marked by unbelonging and cultural schizophrenia. Her fantasies of marriage, rooted in romanticized Indian ideals, collapse in the face of harsh immigrant realities, leading to psychological breakdown and ultimately, tragedy. Through this analysis, the paper argues that *Wife* challenges the celebratory narratives of hybrid cultural identity by highlighting the alienation and fragmentation it can bring, especially for immigrant women who struggle to reconcile traditional roles with the expectations of a foreign society.

1. Introduction

Cultural hybridity, a concept central to postcolonial and diaspora studies, refers to the blending and interaction of different cultural identities that emerge from migration and transnational experiences. Homi K. Bhabha, in his seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994), theorizes hybridity as the product of cultural negotiation occurring in what he terms the "third space"—a space of in-betweenness where identity is neither fixed nor pure but constantly evolving through cultural encounters. This diasporic space becomes a site of struggle and transformation for immigrants, who often find themselves torn between the values of their native land and those of the host country. In this space, identity is unstable, fractured, and perpetually in flux. Bharati Mukherjee, a prominent voice in Indian diaspora literature, portrays this hybridity and identity conflict with remarkable sensitivity, especially in the lives of immigrant women. Her novel *Wife* presents a poignant and disturbing account of Dimple Das Gupta, a young Bengali woman whose migration to America intensifies her psychological

disintegration rather than providing liberation or self-actualization. Unlike many of Mukherjee's other protagonists who eventually embrace transformation, Dimple resists assimilation, resulting in an unresolved cultural and existential crisis. The novel highlights the darker, often overlooked dimensions of the immigrant experience, especially for women entrapped within traditional expectations and modern realities. This paper seeks to explore Dimple's character through the lens of hybrid cultural identity, focusing on how her inability to negotiate between cultures leads to alienation, psychological trauma, and identity loss. It argues that *Wife* offers a critical perspective on the promises and perils of hybridity, illustrating that for some immigrants—especially women—living in a psychologically unstable space of transition can be a source of fragmentation rather than empowerment.

It challenges the dominant scholarly tendency that sees hybrid cultural identity and the third space as primarily productive, liberating, or empowering conditions in *Wife*. The novel shows how a lack of personal agency, emotional support and active engagement in one's own culture or the other can lead to the destruction of hybridity as seen through Dimple's psychological breakdown and violent reaction. This analysis makes it clear that Dimple's tragedy is not merely an Indian versus American story, but a story of her failure to build a self that fits between the two cultures, revealing a gendered and psychologically debilitating aspect of the life lived between cultures.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research method, specifically a textual analysis approach, to explore the theme of cross-cultural subjectivity and crisis of belonging in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife*. The analysis is rooted in postcolonial theoretical frameworks, particularly Homi K. Bhabha (1994) argues that the concepts of the Third Space, hybridity, and mimicry challenge fixed notions of cultural identity, which provide the lens through which the protagonist's psychological and cultural conflicts are interpreted. The study involves a close reading of the novel to identify narrative strategies, character development, and symbolic representations that highlight the immigrant experience. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, critical essays, and theoretical texts on diaspora literature and postcolonialism are also consulted to support the analysis. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how Mukherjee portrays the complex negotiations of identity that occur when an individual is caught between two conflicting cultural paradigms.

3. Results and Discussion

Cultural hybridity is defined as the exchange and innovation of ideas and artifacts between cultures as a product of migration. Bhabha pioneered the concept of hybridity of culture in *The Location of Culture* (1994) asserting that no culture is pure since it always comes in contact with other cultures. Hybridization of culture, resulting from blending of different cultural elements as a consequence of interactions of people from different cultural backgrounds, creates the crisis of the individual's identity. Bhabha proposes the theory of hybridity which uses such concepts as mimicry, hybridity, ambivalence and a liminal position with a view to arguing that an immigrant is culturally hybridized in the host country. He connects the concept of hybridity with in-between or an intermediate cultural space. In *The Location of Culture* he defines hybridity as "the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities ... the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 159). According to him, hybridity depends upon two fixed and pure cultural localities.

Although the concept of hybridity of Bhabha is proposed for colonial framework, the literary theorists have applied it to the analysis of diaspora literature on the ground that it provides them with deeper understanding of the themes of hybridization of culture and identity of the immigrants, their agonies of standing in the diasporic space from where they cannot claim belonging to a particular culture. In the recent decades, cultural hybridization has become a major issue in the analysis of diaspora literature. Bhabha's focus is mainly on what happens on the borderlines of cultures and on in-between cultures. In cultural encounters immigrants

feel themselves belonging to no particular culture. As a result, a sense of unbelongingness emerges in them which contributes to the formation of a new identity for them.

Bharati Mukherjee emerged as an Indian diaspora author in 1971 through *The Tiger's Daughter*. The trauma and agonies the Indian immigrants are confronted with in the host country are basic to her works of fiction. In her fictional works, Mukherjee's prime focus is on the diaspora women's isolation, alienation, cultural clash, culture shock, cross-cultural crisis, search and struggle for identity, bitter experiences of and their emergence from bondage of subaltern identity. Herself an immigrant in America, Bharati Mukherjee truly understands the predicament of the Indian immigrants resulting from their cultural dislocation, uprootedness from roots and native culture, difficulties of assimilation of the alien culture, cross-cultural clash and their confused identity. From Mukherjee's life it is reported that as an Indian immigrant in America she was entangled between American and Bengali cultures. Educated and finally settled in America, married to a foreigner- these are all concerned with her identity as an immigrant and assimilation of and acculturation to American culture. In all her fictional works the most significant thing to notice is that Mukherjee considered herself an immigrant, not an expatriate, "she insisted on being read as an immigrant American writer and not as an Indian expatriate writer" (Grewal, 1993, p. 181).

Mukherjee's particularity lies in the portrayal of women immigrant protagonists in her novels. She makes a certain departure from other Indian diaspora authors such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Arvind Adiga, Shoshi Deshpande, Sashi Tharoor, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mira Sayal and Sunetra Gupta in that all the protagonists of her novels are Indian women immigrants and expatriates modeled either on her autobiographical elements or on her elder sister Mira who also migrated to America in 1961 before Bharati Mukherjee. The female protagonists are portrayed as being in flux between their homeland and the host country. Each of them struggles hard to form a new identity in the host country. Their sense of belongingness is threatened with their uprootedness from homeland. They are always in paranoia of belonging and unbelonging either to the homeland or to the adopted country. Strong sense of detachment from both the native culture and the host culture affects their life leading them to entanglement in-between two cultures. It is particularly noticeable that Mukherjee's Indian immigrant women protagonists are cultural hybrids who inhabit the third space, a postcolonial concept formulated by Homi K. Bhabha to describe the location of immigrants in space and time.

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* is a novel about the first generation Indian immigrant in America. The novel deals with the difficulties of acculturating to a new culture. *Wife* is an exception from other novels in the sense that the protagonist of the novel declines to adjust to the new culture; rather she clings to her own culture and roots. The story of the novel concerns the tragic life of Dimple Das Gupta, an immigrant from west Bengal whose tragedy results from "unmet dreams of an unbalanced personality lacking grace and decency and failing to grow out of adolescent fantasies" (Karpagam & Veeramani, 2021, p. 2239). The theme of *Wife* is as traditional as that of other diaspora fiction: immigration, acculturation, assimilation, cultural dislocation, crisis of belonging, hybrid cultural formation and in-betweenness. The novel opens with Indian tradition of story-telling: "Dimple Dasgupta had set her heart on marrying a neurosurgeon, but her father was looking for engineers in the matrimonial ads" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 1). The protagonist is obsessed with the idea of marriage to a physician but her father arranges her marriage to Amit Basu, an engineer. Dimple is obsessed with romantic dream about marriage. Her marriage to an engineer, therefore, clashes with her romantic dream. An obedient daughter of middle-class Bengali parents, Dimple is always in a fantasy world but her fantasy collapses and she is destroyed. Her tragedy lies in her constructing "a dream world for herself, secluded from the rest of the world" (Karpagam & Veeramani, 2021, p. 2239).

After their marriage they migrate to America where Dimple tries to assimilate the new alien culture but she cannot cope with it because of her realization that America is not what she anticipated in her fantasy. In the new land, she is torn between her self-actualisation and the social role she is expected to fulfill. Mukherjee has made efforts to portray Dimple as searching

for her own identity in the host country. Soon she is confronted with cultural clash between the east and the west. The culture shock that she receives in the land of immigration is practically a grave predicament which almost all the Indian immigrants face putting their feet there. In the expert hands of Bharati Mukherjee, Dimple is portrayed as deeply frightened and alienated, experiencing a life filled with regret, turmoil, agitation, and trauma. Her transformation from the typical Indian girl to a new woman in the new world laden with new ideas and values is inevitably the point of focus in the novel because this transformation is significant in diaspora writing. Cross-cultural identity is an issue which Dimple tries to establish in her private world and also tries to liberate herself from the tyranny of tormented female psyche.

A common trend that exists in the world of immigrants and expatriates is that they feel deeply attached to their homeland but belong to neither the homeland nor the host country. This is a sort of repositioning in the diasporic space or in-betweenness. It is undeniable that Americanisation has provided Dimple with ample opportunity for achieving freedom and flexibility by means of which she redefines complex human relationships at the height of culture confluence. Dimple initially believes that marriage “would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpet lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities and love. Marriage would bring her love ... would free her, fill her with passion. Discreet and virgin, she waited for real life to begin” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 3, 13). But in fact marriage has exhausted her, undone her life. Dimple’s naivety makes her think that marriage is a thrilling matter which would create much sensation in her life and give her opportunity to create her own identity. Overtaken by and oscillating between fear and fantasy Dimple is always worried about her “sitar-shaped body and rudimentary breasts” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 4). Dimple’s ideas of marriage are vague, deriving from the exaggerated art of Indian films, movie magazines and the advice columns in ladies’ periodicals. Her arranged marriage by means of matrimonial advertisements in the ethnic newspapers and magazines. Driven to shock and then to despair, Dimple entertains psychological trauma in the form of loss of her identity.

Dimple’s sole aim in life is marriage; she waits for this miraculous happening, liberating: “Discreet and virgin, she waited for real life to begin” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 13). For her, marriage meant, “being free and expressing yourself” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 20). Contrary to all her expectations, Dimple finds that marriage has robbed her of all romantic yearnings; she realises that marriage has betrayed her. In fact, marriage becomes a burden for her; she feels herself cheated. Unable to realise the true nature of love and freedom, Dimple dreams of marriage as a means of freedom. Dimple’s dreams remain unfulfilled. Her belief that true happiness lies in the west appears unreal; she collapses and is utterly disillusioned about the western society and its culture. She goes neurotic and kills her husband Amit Basu at the end of the novel. Indhumati and Ramesh rightly comments: “Dimple has quite romantic illusions but considers her marriage to be a blessing in disguise. She dreams that her marriage will bring her freedom, fortune, and happiness. But what she experiences is far from what she cherishes. She wants to eliminate the taboos and becomes an escapist. She has to face cultural shocks in an alien land” (Indumathi & Ramesh, 2018, p. 26). In fact, she fails to understand that marriage will offer her more bondages curtailing her freedom. Her husband is a typical Bengali middle-class unimaginative man unable to understand his wife’s mental cravings. Conflict, therefore, emerge in her and she starts resenting the new home, the in-laws and her husband who utterly fails to feed her fantasy, to meet out the requirements of her imaginative world. In her in-law’s home her mother-in law gives her a new name ‘Nandini’ since it sounds foreign to her but Dimple does not like the name, she protests against the new name: “it was this passive resistance, this withholding of niggardly affection from Amit, this burying of one’s head among dusty, lace doilies that she found so degrading” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 30). The process of the dissolution of her delusion about marriage probably starts from this event. Her resistance passively functions at this stage of her married life with Amit. She begins to reconstruct her ideal man on the basis of the faces from the magazines. At this stage, she fails to identify herself with anyone in the family and feels disgusted about becoming a mother. Becoming a mother

to her seems an outrage on her body. So, she induces an abortion by jumping over the rope disposing of the 'tyrannical and vile' thing deposited in her body. Her justification is that she cannot afford herself to carry any relics from her past life to America. Her living in the fantasy world for so long a time has contributed to the formation her psyche in such a way that she is emotionally incapable of understanding other people including her husband. Before migrating to America she upholds herself as an iconoclast breaking through the "traditional taboos of a wife. She aspires for freedom and love in marriage. This aim brings her indignation, grief, resentment, peevishness, spite and sterile anger. Dimple wants to do away with traditional taboos of a wife and hence she becomes an escapist, lost in her world of fantasy" (Trivedi, 2009, p. 76). In America she feels as if she has been turned into a non-human being like a bug. A sense of impending disaster always troubles her: "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 a bug on the living room wall and rug" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 156).

As a wife, Dimple tries hard to comply with her husband's wishes and desires but she fails because of her obsession with the dream and fantasy about an ideal man. But Mukherjee seems to stress that her entire association with her husband does not testify that she is like an Indian wife, not pious like the mythological Indian women, a complete "reverse to that of woman in old Indian mythology where there was pious Sita, known for her chastity and righteousness but here is Dimple who gets indifferent from her own husband and tries to seduce another man when she gets failure in feeding her fantasy world" (Jain, 2018, p. 46). Dimple feels that Amit is not the man of her dreams. Both in India and America her life with Amit is a huge disappointment since marriage has not "provided all the glittery things she had imagined had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 101). Amit fails to understand Dimple mentally, physically and emotionally as a result of which "on her first day in the H.Y.V apartment she felt like a star collapsing inwardly" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 69). She tries her best to share her fears and apprehensions with Amit, but he pays no attention to her concerns. Even he does not try to understand Dimple's problems which she wants to ventilate to her husband. He is too much occupied with mundane affairs and does not care for his wife's predicament. As a consequence Dimple feels lonely, abandoned and hopeless and suffers from nightmares and indecisiveness. None of them tries to understand other's life and emotions. In a sense migration to America brings about a disastrous consequence for both Amit and Dimple. In the alien culture, they distance themselves from each other. Once exposed to the alien culture, they "fail to communicate their true feelings for each other. This failure in communication develops a breach between the couple which widens day by day and ultimately ruins their relationship" (Aarthilaxmi, 2018, p. 874).

The traumatic experience that Dimple has received from her husband makes her psychologically paralysed. All her efforts to overcome the psychological trauma go in vain and she ultimately feels frustrated and indulges in total estrangement from herself and the surroundings. Her new life in America becomes just a nightmare for her and she "sinks into a world of isolation, unable to welcome the bright prospect of setting up a new home even after Amit gets a job ... Torn by the conflict between her fantasy world and the reality of her situation, she allows her mind to be totally conditioned by the commercials on T.V. and magazines so much so she loses the ability to distinguish them from the world of reality" (Trivedi, 2009, p. 77). In such moment of crisis she turns toward outrageous adultery with Milt Grasser which her Indian tradition questions. Marriage frequently distresses her, annoys her, unable to relate to others effectively, feels emotionally disturbed, undergoes the disordered pattern of behavioural and psychological disturbance produced by the conflict within the structure of her personality. Her neurotic disturbance makes her avoid her husband Amit and other acquaintances. This is how Dimple alienates herself from life and the community which functions heavily on her resulting in the total disruption of her personality and womanhood. Freud argues that humans are governed by a "programme of the pleasure principle" which is

interested in “happiness in the sense of gaining pleasure and avoiding pain” (Freud, 1964, p. 163). Dimple’s escape into a dream world may be viewed as a perversion of this: a failure to find emotional satisfaction from her husband, her migration, and her social milieu, she finds emotional satisfaction through imaginative projections of romantic love, visual images from television and pop culture. But as the gap between her fantasies and her real life keeps growing, she becomes more and more frustrated, alienated, and then goes psychopathic. Her involvement with the media “is so deep that she gets obsessed with words like dark, evil, sinister, gruesome, murder, suicide, mugging etc. she completely trusts the media” (Aarthilaxmi, 2018, p. 874).

Exposed to cross-cultural shock, Dimple strongly clings to her Bengali culture and roots. To her, American culture is hostile to her native culture which causes devastation in her sensitive inner world. Her conflict is precipitated and aggravated by the new American culture. Like Dimple, her husband Amit does not suffer the same conflict since his psyche is structured quite differently. However, cultural conflicts in Dimple are aggravated by the psychological conflicts resulting from her estrangement from her homeland culture. It is doubtlessly affirmed that she desperately tries to forget her Bengali roots but American culture demands her to live in it, to assimilate and to acculturate to it. Dimple compares her mental disturbance and deteriorated mental condition with two Indian American friends Ina Mullick and Leni who like her are equally unfulfilled. They have struggled hard to assimilate American culture but their efforts have gone in vain. She realises that America with all its outward glitters only allow the Indian immigrant women to produce ‘little Indians’ but do not allow them either freedom or fulfillment.

Dimple is confused about wishing to become American. She fluctuates between her home of origin and the world of her origin. Borrowing American outfit from Marsha she puts on them to identify herself with the new American culture. Like the Americans, she flirts with Milt Glasser. Failing to acculturate to American culture Dimple negates it. Complete isolation engulfs her as she is caught in a whirlwind of traumatic emotions. In such a state of mental condition Dimple overtly expresses her situation: “I am terrible in crises” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 204). Dimple might have shared her crisis with her husband but does not do so because she knows well that Amit is not a person to listen and be attentive to her; he is simply indifferent to Dimple that leads her to develop an extra-marital love affair with Milt Glasser. Totally frustrated, Dimple takes the terrible decision to kill her husband. In the utmost level of psychological and emotional tensions she thinks that she cannot bear this type of life for her whole life; she needs freedom from the burden of this sort of life. Taking the knife from the kitchen drawer she hits seven times to confirm Amit’s death. This act of murder ends up her disharmonious married life which has become an acute agony and suffering for her.

Trapped between Bengali and American cultures Dimple escapes into a third one- her imagined world. Like other Indian Americans, she cannot comply with its culture and cannot drag her life with promises of fulfillment betrayed. She feels unknown to herself, “her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice an instance desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 117). Her killing of her husband Amit asserts her American identity. But in fact she belongs neither to Indian culture nor to American culture; she is simply a wanderer between these two cultures although all her efforts are given to attain her own identity. She has failed to release herself from the imagined world of magazines and television serials, yet she feels the need to release her ‘self’ from the hallucinatory world, get out of her schizophrenic self. All her imagination falls apart, the “imaginary world that she had so carefully and lovingly created begins to shatter into little fragments” ((Aarthilaxmi, 2018, p. 872). Dimple’s alienation from her own culture and upbringing eats away at her mind until she loses her judgment completely. Lashing out at her husband, she does not merely kill him with a knife but actually cuts off his head. As a first generation immigrant Dimple undergoes the pains and agonies of uprootedness and displacement, alienation and loneliness. Her alienation from her own culture eats away herself and drains out her blood, “Cultural displacement made Dimple more neurotic and her

personality disorders came out in the alienated land because she could not find a close associate with whom she could share her feelings and her husband was not the type of the person who could understand the expectations of Dimple. In a quest for a new identity and caught between the native culture and the alien culture these type of characters try to adopt the new culture. In the process they undergo psychological transformation which is often involved with violence as in the case of Dimple” (Deshpande, 2018, p. 822).

Dimple fails to assimilate American culture, tradition and lifestyle not because she does not try but because she is deeply attached to her Bengali culture. One of the major realizations Dimple achieves is that it is difficult to adjust with those people who do not understand about Bengal’s ever greatest festival Durga Puja. In a sense, at the end of the novel, Dimple seems deeply troubled by and disgusted with American life and culture, which have contributed to her timidity and nervousness. Knowing that she will not be caught, she stabs Amit. After stabbing him, she comments, “This would not have happened if we stayed in Calcutta. I was never so nervous back home” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 132). Dimple, like Tara in *Desirable Daughters* (2002), is not engrossed in the memories of her home country. Tara’s attachment to her past makes her travel back to Calcutta when her expectations fail and turn out to be disappointments. Dimple renounces her past and present for the sake of her future. In terms of cultural confrontations and conflicts, both of them stand on the equal footing with some difference. Tara undergoes the trauma of cultural conflicts and confrontation but she does not go eccentric but Dimple behaves in an eccentric way. Her psychological eccentricity reaches such a point that after returning to Calcutta she justifies herself by telling that she cannot afford to take any relics from her old life to America. Moreover, out of psychic eccentricity she decides to stab her husband Amit.

Dimple 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 dinzy restaurants where they sold divine Kababs rolled in roti” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 101-102). Her disillusionment about marriage reaches such an extreme point that even she thinks of not being mother out of such a failed and frustrating marriage. Ultimately Dimple wants to get rid of her pregnancy: “whatever it was that blocked her tubes and pipes” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 31). She complains of exhaustion which her husband Amit attributes to her meager diet. At a certain point she loses her temper at this instance: “I feel sort of dead inside and you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You never listen; you have 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” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 110). Dimple 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?” (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 112). Her whole world is limited to the four-walls of the apartment and media becomes her only friend. Her nostalgic feeling manifests itself in her realization of how easy it was to live, to communicate, and to share with people in Calcutta. She never felt frightened at the sight of the policemen whose faces were so friendly, but the scene has changed completely in the new environment. In American society, “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, marginalized” (Choudhury, 1995, p. 84). Dimple intensely feels that 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” (Sandler, 1975, p. 75). America, which was once a land of dreams, now appears to her a land of psychic fear and trauma. 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”(Mukherjee, 1990, p. 129). As the novel progresses towards its conclusion,

we see Dimple becoming more yearning to seek revenge from America. Her spirit rebels, she starts going out with Ina and Milt and enjoys all the prohibited freedom. The hike only leaves her even more perplexed. She turns neurotic and fails to differentiate between what she sees on T.V. and what she experiences herself in real life. 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. (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 156).

Dimple's gloom deepens with every passing day. She starts realizing: "Her life was slow, full of miscalculation" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 178). The only thing Amit could see in Dimple was the external change which he terms as Culture shock. Dimple begins to talk about killing her husband. The violence on the outside becomes violence on the inside. Now she cannot tell between what she's seeing on TV, and what she thinks. Amit her husband also fails to feed her girlish fancy, to appear before her as a 'prince charming'. She remains unfulfilled in her in-law's house as well as in her new home in America. 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 T.V. series" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 195). The problem with Amit is that "he lacked extravagance; he preserved in the immigrant virtues of caution and cunning" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 195). He fails to mark the emotional cracking-up of Dimple. "He never thought of such things, never thought how hard it was for her to keep quiet and smile though she was falling apart like a very old toy that had been played with, something quite roughly, by children who claimed to love her" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 212). It is now evident that Dimple's gruesome act has nothing to do with cultural-shock. She, however, is not an expatriation victim, but a victim of her own over-nervous sensibility, as a result of popular advertisement fantasies.

In a multicultural land like America, Dimple is confronted with a "dilemma of cultures which is a domino effect of her phobic condition in the end. Two incidents from the novel, one, her enforced self-abortion and the other, her atrocious assassination of her husband are emblematic expression of her turmoil flanked by the other and the self" (Shukla, 2014, p. 22). Process of Americanisation begins in Dimple immediately after she reaches America with her husband Amit. She achieves boundless freedom. But the immediate effect also begins with her freedom. Amit struggles hard to keep her happy with all means but fails to give her time because of his search for a job without which it is difficult to survive in America. As a result Dimple has to stay most of times alone at her new home. She starts believing that Amit does not care her. Feeling ignored by her husband Amit, Dimple often falls in quarrels with him complaining that "I feel sort of dead inside you never listen; you've never listened to me. You hate me. Don't deny it" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 110). She spends most of her time for hours watching films television serials portraying the events and scenes of violence, suspense, thrill and murder. These films and serials give her a sense of security that murderers are not caught. This final act of Americanisation becomes disastrous for her. Exhausted with her sick damaged psyche she decides to murder her husband to get rid of the burdensome marriage.

Immigration for Dimple poses a new dilemma in America. Conflict between her Bengali culture and American culture starts which causes psychological crisis in her. The cross-cultural confrontation results in her total isolation from the familial circle, from her husband, from her neighbours and from her own self. Her so long desired immigration in America brings her nothing but alienation, loss of selfhood, culture shock and psychological conflict. This cultural conflict occurs as her Bengali cultural values and beliefs clash with those of American way of

life. Caught between the conflicting cultures, she attempts to find an identity of her own although the feeling in-betweenness causes huge confusion of her individual identity. Naturally Dimple suffers acutely the trauma of displacement and dislocations resulting in a new narrative of identity. Her failure to adjust with new culture brings her to undergoing cultural transformation. In this way Dimple loses the roots of her native culture on one hand and fails to assimilate the new culture of America. As a result she undergoes traumatic process of culture shock in her search for identity in alien culture. Her uprooting from her family and her familiar world and her failure to adapt the new world culminates in the projection into a social vacuum. Following her exposure to alien culture through media Dimple spirit rebels and to feed her rebelling spirit she starts socializing with Ina Mullick and Milt Glasser, wearing Marsha's outfits and tinted glasses, the most typical index of American culture, and enjoying prohibited freedom.

She manages to seduce Milt Glasser in her own bedroom, but conceals it from Amit. This is because Dimple's work is only a result of her desire to become part of American culture. Finally she turns into a neurotic. She complains against her life: "Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a chimera...she was furious, desperate; felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster..." (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 56). Amit notices the external changes that take place in Dimple, and correlates this with cultural shock. He even promises her to take to India. However, nothing alters her nature. Dimple's life takes a dark turn with influence of the media. She thinks of killing her husband: "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 T.V series" (Mukherjee, 1990, p. 195). There are ten ways Dimple can kill herself. She becomes schizophrenic, sees her body and soul apart. She has an imaginary illness and insomnia as a result. She doesn't distinguish between the film life and the real life. She emotionally breaks down. Despite Dimple's best efforts to adapt to the alien culture, the values that seem to dominate the Indian culture in her condemn her for her extra marital relationship with Milt Glasser. Her deterioration is complete when in an almost dream like state she kills her husband. Dimple would not have undergone such humiliations had she stayed in India. She would have learnt to reconcile herself to her frustrations. She would never have been a murderess.

At Jyoti and Meena Sen's apartment Dimple comes to an awareness of the ways of the American life consisting of violence, rape and murder. Her eyes are dazzled with the material comforts, money, honey and prosperity. These fascinating elements of the American society leads Dimple to get Americanized but her assimilation with the American culture gets complete through Ina Mullick and Milt Glasser. But it does not take a long time for her to get disillusioned. Dimple's fascination for American culture and lifestyle wanes and she starts experiencing cultural shock in the new land. Born in a totally different culture and society like Calcutta it is too much tough to adjust to the American way of life. The two worlds are too different for her to familiarize herself with and cross. It is also shocking to Dimple that New York is the world's most crime-ridden city. Further, she is dismayed to find it gives Indian wives just a bit of liberty. She feels disassociative from herself and her environment. She finds that there is a big difference between her dream life and her life in reality. She becomes so isolated. Even Amit doesn't know anything about Dimple. He says that Dimple needs to go out and make friends with Americans and does not want him to be at home always. But she is not daring to go out and to mix with them. In Mukherjee's interpretation of Dimple's state of mind, the mind is caught up in the dilemma of cultures.

Dimple embodies the complexities and challenges faced by individuals who straddle two or more cultural worlds. She grapples with the cultural clash between her Indian heritage and the American environment and faces the challenge of reconciling traditional Indian values and customs with the individualistic and progressive values of Western society. Her struggle to adapt to the new culture is emblematic of the tension experienced by many immigrants.

Dimple's name itself represents her hybrid identity. She changes her name to Melanie to fit into her new American life. This act reflects the common immigrant experience of altering one's identity to conform to the host culture while also holding onto elements of the native culture. Dimple consciously adapts her appearance and clothing to blend into American society. She dyes her hair blonde, wears revealing clothes and embraces a more Westernized sense of style. This physical transformation is a manifestation of her attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture. Her relationship with her husband Amit is another dimension of her cultural liminality. Amit is drawn to Dimple's exotic Indian qualities; yet he is also attracted to her Westernized persona. This dynamic mirrors the fascination that many individuals from different cultures have for each other and the interplay of tradition and modernity within relationships.

Throughout the novel, Dimple grapples with psychological fragmentation. She struggles to reconcile her past and present, her Indian heritage and her American life. This inner conflict is a hallmark of the cultural hybrid experience as individuals often find themselves torn between different aspects of their identity. Dimple's isolation within her American neighborhood further emphasizes her cultural liminality. She feels like an outsider in both her Indian and American communities illustrating the common feeling of not fully belonging to either cultural group. Mukherjee says that Dimples' mental condition is the problem of cultures. At each of her four quarters of life, Dimple feels lonely. In order to combat the feeling, she seeks the aid of the media. T.V is the only friend she has now. She has had such a deep involvement with the media that the words dark, evil, sinister, gruesome, murder, suicide, mugging etc. are some words that get her obsessed. She relies on and believes the media. As a result, she becomes unknown to herself, an outsider to her own self and even "her body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne" (Mukherjee, 1990, P. 117).

By the end of the novel, Dimple makes a bold decision to embrace her Indian identity by reconnecting with her Indian heritage and rejecting the American lifestyle that had led her to changing her name and appearance. This resolution underscores the fluid nature of cultural identity and the possibility of reclaiming one's roots. Her journey from India to the United States, her name change, her struggle to adapt and her ultimate decision to reconcile with her Indian identity all highlight the complexities and challenges faced by individuals who are trapped in multiple cultures. Dimple serves as a powerful representation of the immigrant experience and the ongoing negotiation of cultural identity.

With her hybridized identity, Dimple finds herself belonging nowhere- neither to Bengal nor to America; she keenly tries to know who and what she is. Mukherjee has portrayed her as an abnormal woman incapable of adjusting in the new world, as a woman hating all that surrounds her, unable to compromise with her married life. Without assimilating and acculturating to the American culture and way of life, she tries to be an ideal wife. The consequence is terrible; she kills herself at the end of the novel. Her infidelity and murder bring the novel to its shocking close. The hybridized identity she has had in American culture pains her more than most. She can accept the culture neither of her origin nor of America. Finally she goes neurotic and ends her life with her own hands.

4. Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* offers a haunting portrayal of the psychological disintegration of an immigrant woman caught in the crosscurrents of cultural expectations and diasporic dislocation. Dimple Das Gupta's failure to assimilate into American society, coupled with her inability to fully detach from her Indian roots, places her in a state of profound alienation and emotional paralysis. Her tragic trajectory underscores the darker side of cultural hybridity—where the promised freedom of the diasporic space becomes instead a site of confusion, loss, and psychological fragmentation.

Through the lens of Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concept, particularly the concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space, Dimple's experience reflects the agonizing tension between belonging and unbelonging that many first-generation immigrants endure. Rather than achieving a redefined identity, Dimple succumbs to her inner turmoil, highlighting that cultural convergence does not always result in empowerment or transformation. Instead, *Wife* reveals that for some, particularly women constrained by patriarchal traditions and overwhelmed by cultural transition, hybridity can become a source of existential crisis. Mukherjee thus complicates the discourse of diaspora literature by refusing to romanticize the immigrant journey and by exposing the psychological cost of cultural displacement.

In the wider context, Dimple's tragedy requires for diaspora studies to go beyond celebratory narratives of migration, assimilation and hybridity and to acknowledge the differential emotional and gendered conditions of cultural negotiation. Postcolonial theory is also called into question to rethink the third space, not as a site of resistance and identity construction, but as a potentially destructive space in the absence of migrants' agency, social support, and secure sense of belonging. So, *Wife* broadens the theoretical sense of hybridity as an in-between phenomenon revealing not only the formation of new identities, but also their silence and violence as well as the psychological collapse.

5. References

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