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**IMMIGRANT SENSIBILITY IN BHARATHI MUKHERJEE'S –WIFE**

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**Abstract**

Bharathi Mukherjee one of the most well known diasporic writers, is an American of Indian origin. The Indian-born mukherjee is one of the most articulate spokesperson of immigrant sensibility and cross culture concerns, particularly the Indian immigrant experience in US. She was born in Calcutta in 1940 and at the age of eight along with her family she moved to Britain. Mukherjee became a Canadian citizen after her marriage and her works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants and the feelings of alienation often experienced by expatriates as well as Indian woman. Mukherjee's 'Wife' traces the journey of woman character as immigrants. This article attempts to explore the theme of identity crisis or dilemma and the search for identity of Indian women immigrants through the metaphor of immigration. Most of Mukherjee's novels centre on the immigrant experiences of women from India who immigrate to the United States. Identity dilemma or identity crisis is the consequential fact of immigration.

**Key words:** Immigration, expatriates, consequential, diasporic, spokesperson.

**Introduction**

Post-colonial studies have been preoccupied with issues of hybridity, in- betweenness with mobility and crossover ideas and problems generated by colonialism. Mixed or globalized culture has come to characterize the terms like 'hybridity' and 'diaspora'. The etymological root of the term 'diaspora' can be traced to Greek Origin 'Dia'(through) and 'spora' means( to scatter). Diaspora evokes the specific trauma of human displacement. The oxford English dictionary defines diaspora as "the dispersion of any people from their traditional homeland. The core elements of diaspora are dispersion in space, orientation to a 'homeland' and 'boundary maintenance'. Dispersion in space indicates "forced or otherwise traumatic dispersion" of people. The second element of diaspora 'homeland orientation' refers to "the orientation to a real or imagined 'homeland' as an authoritative source of value, identity or loyalty. In contemporary literature diasporic writing has emerged with an exciting development and marked by global migration. The term 'identity- crisis' was coined by Erikson, which reflects the conflict people encounter as they negotiate the eight developmental stages in life.

Each stage, however, poses “psychological crisis” that must be addressed before moving on the next stage. According to Erikson, “an optimal sense of identity of identity” (165) is essential for one’s psycho social well-being.

The article focuses on the identity dilemma of Mukherjee’s novel ‘Wife’. In ‘wife’, the protagonist Dimple Dasgupta, a middle-class Bengali girl gets married to an engineer, Amit Kumar Basu. Her friends approvingly describe him as “Amitabh Bachchan the second”. The shift to the Basu family is a traumatic transition for Dimple. She marries with the belief that marriage would bring her love, freedom, and cocktail parties. She dreams of a different kind of life-“an apartment in chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls- so she placed her faith in neuro- surgeons and architects” (3). But her father tells her to marry Amit, an Engineer. It shocks her and makes her tense. Dimple had many expectations but in contrary to her expectations, she finds living in a joint family stressful. Her experiences as a new bride highlight her outsider status where her needs, aspirations, hopes and concerns are squashed under notions of tradition and propriety.

The protagonist, born and brought up in a middle-class family in Calcutta, feels strange and alien when they shift to New York. She wonders about the huge buildings in New York: “she had never been such bigger building’s before; the bigness was thrilling and a little scary as well”(52). After reaching America , Amit and Dimple stay with the Jyoti Sens, his old friend’s home. In a traditional Indian marriage, power imbalance is manifested in the relationship between the partners. Dimple’s perceptiveness of this aspect is a source of identity conflict. Early in her marriage, she discovers that marital relations are not even remotely democratic. Rather, it serves to reinforce asymmetrical power relationships. Sometimes Amit shows his displeasure when he comes from office. He finds that Dimple has not prepared his customary fresh lime and water and he remarks, “This little thing that means a lot to me” (26). In several parts of India, it is common for brides to be conferred a new name by the husband’s family. In this novel one finds an instance of naming by a patriarchal strategy of control. Dimple’s mother-in-law insists on conferring a new name – “Nandhini” on her daughter –in- law. Dimple doesn’t like this and protests to her husband about the change of name. She says “ I don’t sound like Nandhini”(18). When Amit asks her, “What is in a name?” Dimple answers with quiet self –assertion “ Everything”. Through this Dimple gives voice for the change of her name and she is student about the erasure of her identity and super imposing a new identity, sanctified by patriarchy and implemented by patriarchal surrogates such as her mother-in- law. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman writer and the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary imagination (2000) wrote, “Woman in Patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to mere properties” (12). Dimple is burdened with self- effacing notion of Indian woman hood. The patriarchal society hardly permits a woman to talk of liberation and equality. Dimple as a Indian middle class Bengali sense of her own identity and marginality encloses all of her reactions to her new environment.

The traditional role expectations are a source of identity conflict for an immigrant woman. At a social gathering, Amit Proudly announce that Dimple “does not like alcoholic beverages, she doesn’t even like coke”(77). Dimple feels constrained by expectations of fulfilling other’s expectations.

Here one could see the identity dilemma of Dimple's struggle or conflict between demands to preserve the traditions of the home culture and the need to acculturate as an immigrant. Bharathi Mukherjee beautifully sums up Dimple's diasporic predicament thus:

She felt that Amit was waiting for just the right answer, that it was up to her to Uphold Bengali womanhood, marriage and male pride. 'The right answer, I do not need stimulants to feel happy in my husband's presence...ligation is to my Husband'... My obligation is to my husband's, seemed to dance before her eyes as though it were printed on a card. All she had to do was to read it, but she feared Ina's laughter or anger more than anything else in the world. If she took a drink she knew Amit would write to his mother and his mother would call the Dasguptas and accuse them of raising an immortal drunken daughter.(78)

The process of remaining her role as a preserver of tradition and her yearning to break free of such strictures is ambivalent for an immigrant woman. Dimple struggles with two cultures in order to find her identity. Dimple marries Amit in order to get a fantastic life, she imagines a fantasy life in America but there she is torn between two cultures and two world views. She starts realizing that her life was slow "full of miscalculations" (178). Dimple is shocked when she experiences a different environment and she slowly adapts herself to the American culture and Americanism. In order to celebrate this Americanism, Amit arranges a party in his apartment and he compels Dimple to drink a sip of beer. Earlier, she was exposed to American culture through magazines and T.V. and now Amit teaches her one by one. Dimple is shocked at her own intensity of feeling and her capacity of hate and her desires which lead to violence. Neither the cultural conflict nor a feminine need for freedom can account dimple's behavior and imagination. Rootlessness is her main cause for her problems and she finds herself at cross-roads and cannot come to terms with either her own culture or American's culture. Dimple's mind is always constricted by fear about mugging and rape. She mistakenly hurts Amit's finger with a knife, when he came home late and crept upon her from behind as she was chopping garlic. Amit's points out her foolishness and says, "How could anyone come in through the window? We're on the fourteenth floor, for god's sake!"(129). Dimple's mind was not in static oscillates and she is unable to find her identity, she feels alienated from both the cultures. She turns neurotic and fails to differentiate between what she watches on T.V. and what she experiences in her real life. This neurotic change because Dimple becomes interested in the American way of life and she started to enjoys freedom; she even has a relationship with Milt and keeps it secret from Amit. Because of such behavior she fails to identify to which culture she belongs. In a state of psychotic dissociation, she decides contemplating the murder of her husband. She also chooses a spot just under the hair line and draws a magical circle with her fingers and stabs him with a knife many times. There are three reasons for Dimple's neurosis. The Patriarchal society suppresses her and she constricted by that, second the culture shock that she experience in America breaks her apart, even to point of murdering her own husband and third the identity dilemma caused by cultural shock or crisis oppressed her. She struggles between the traditional life style and the American lifestyle. She feels alienated from these two cultures.

She could not find her identity in both the cultures and consequently becomes neurotic and fails to differentiate the real world in which she lives with that of fantasy world. Mukherjee's Wife is about displacement and isolation for it exposes the psychological claustrophobia and the resultant destructive tendencies of that condition in Dimple Dasgupta finds herself immigrating to America. Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between "American culture and traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist's desire to be assertive and the Indian need to be submissive". (Writers of the Indian Diaspora). When a person immigrates, his/her psyche is tragic as a result of tension created in his/her mind between two socio- cultural environments, and he/she is torn between the feelings of rootlessness and nostalgia.

### Conclusion:

Mukherjee Portrays the identity dilemma or crisis that is central to the immigrant experience. Mukherjee's immigrant woman Dimple in 'wife' is trapped between two worlds, the home (birth) country and the host (immigrant) country. One sees an expatriate sensibility distinguished by alienation and loss of identity. Caught between two worlds, the expatriate negotiates a new space caught between two cultures and often languages the expatriate writer negotiates a new literary space. Therefore an anxious sense of dislocation is characteristics of expatriate writing. Dimple's mind of dissolution and turning her to the act of violence can be seen in the light of Michael Foucault's analysis of madness in *Madness and Civilization*(1995), he says " we must try to return, in history, to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a note yet divided experience of division itself"(MC IX).Dimple Dasgupta in *Wife* fails to assimilate with the new culture and she is caught between the identity dilemmas of the two cultures. Dimple with her openness and receptivity to change successfully negotiates the displacement and identity crisis consequent to immigration. Mukherjee suggests that Dimple loss of her sanity may be due to her alienation from her own to American culture. In *Wife* mukherjee iterates the protagonist continuing frustration in adjusting new environments and new culture. Dimple's denial as a victim of cultural displacement and patriarchal discourse is the cause for her madness.

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