



The theme of expatriation, immigration and alienation as treated in Indian Diaspora Literature with special reference to Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*

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Abstract

Bharti Mukherjee is an accomplished writer who was born and raised outside of India. Within the current literary scenario, expatriate writings play a significant role, and Bharti Mukherjee has a unique position. The core complexities of a woman's psyche could be dramatically portrayed in Mukherjee's second novel, *Wife*. It refers to other dimensions of comprehending female marital relationships in addition to the reproduction of female consciousness. The main character is Dimple Dasgupta. She had a dream that she might avoid getting married to a neurosurgeon by getting married to engineer Amit Basu. In the same way that Amit expects Dimple to be a submissive wife, tradition stifles Dimple's diasporic life. They immigrated to America and learned how to deal with loneliness and uncertainty. She climbs to the top of the rope and leaps out of the womb. The story turns tragic as anger is conveyed within the type of maltreatment. Mukherjee's female characters are immigrants who are aware of cultural trauma, but they are also potential women who take the initiative to forge their own identities by taking charge of their exciting journeys. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate how Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* depicts the immigrant experience.

Keywords: Expatriate, diasporic, tradition, trauma, identity

Introduction

The word 'diaspora' is not new to the post-colonial Indian literary scenario. It has carved a niche as a distinct literary genre and has received a world-wide recognition. The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek work "diaspeiro" which means "to scatter" "to disperse" people from their native place. The other word for "diaspora" is "expatriate". The people who migrate to another country from their traditional homeland either 'by choice' or 'by compulsion' are the immigrants. The people who undergo immigration face dislocation not only geographically but also mentally and physically. Some of the immigrant writers like V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander and Bharati Mukherjee through their works have well enunciated the trials and trauma that an immigrant undergoes. These writers have shared their own experience as immigrants in a foreign land and have contributed to Indian diasporic literature by delving deep into the realms of Indian civilization, the rhythm of Ancient mythology and the beauty of their civilization. These diasporic writers have a perpetual quest to revisit their homeland which is quite visible in their works where they have talked about the realities, the diversity and moreover the cultural assimilation their characters face. This paper aims to focus on Bharati Mukherjee's 'Wife' as a diasporic text reflecting on the alienation, sense of homelessness, psychological illness caused by being cut from one's root. She feels nostalgic time and again and re-vitalizes her aching soul by revisiting her childhood memories in India.

Bharati Mukherjee is a post-colonial writer, novelist, short-story writer and critic born in Calcutta, India. She did her schooling from Calcutta and went to Canada and later settled in the United States. Most of Bharati Mukherjee's novels portray the situation of migrants especially women migrants. She deals with the predicament of women

migrated to Canada and the U.S. where they face exile and alienation while finding their place in a foreign land. Bharati Mukherjee's novels have a great relevance in today's time because they convincingly talk about the situation of migrants. Migration is very common today especially in a developing country like India where people in search for better job and a better standard of living move from their native land to some other country. The novel *Wife* discusses the problems, the pain of exile confronted by women migrants.

The protagonist of *Wife* is Dimple Dasgupta who becomes a neurotic patient because of the clash of her old and new identities due to multiple displacement. Dimple is a naïve, intensely emotional young girl who seeks to become more desirable by manipulating her real identity. She studied B.A in Calcutta University but left it incomplete due to some reason. This novel reflects the challenges and hardship an immigrant faces in a new place. She feels that she is less marketable. Mukherjee presents Dimple as a girl who faces problem in identifying her true feminine identity. Even before marriage she does not feel free she thinks that marriage will provide her freedom, good luck and happiness. "Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns Fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love". (Mukherjee 03) Like any other Indian girl the thought of marriage pleases her, she feels that her husband will give her all materialistic comforts which she was longing for. Her father finds her a perfect groom whose name is Amit Kumar Basu who is a consultant engineer and has applied for Visa in Canada. Dimple is very excited and happy for her marriage but all her desires remain unfulfilled. Dimple move to her in-laws' house with her husband which is far more unglamorous than her parent's home. From the very beginning her mother in law does not like her, she does not like her name 'Dimple'

rather she wants to rename her as 'Nandini'. Even from her husband Dimple do not receive the love and attention she once dreamt of. With each passing day she becomes less desirous. "It was this passive resistance; this with holding of niggardly affection from Amit, this burying of one's head among dusty, lace doilies that she found so degrading". (30) Dimple is expected to play the role of an ideal wife and daughter-in-law but her frustration gradually builds up and she resents being a wife in many ways. When she finds that she is pregnant, she takes her pregnancy as a curse unable to embrace her new identity as a mother she jumps a rope until the baby inside her womb got aborted. She feels that her husband's property is in her womb. She hated every creature which was pregnant even a mouse. "As the grey mouse has a bulge stomach. Dimple beats the poor rat to death she self-aborts also for her America seems to be a more attractive promising lands that the baby in her womb." (32) The problem that Dimple faced was that she was adamant in accepting the reality she wanted to run from the reality. She wanted to go to her dream land, she forced her husband until they reached America. After reaching America Dimple feels extremely relieved and happy but her happiness could not stay for too long. Her psychological stress gets intensified when she faces cultural conflict. She gets sandwiched between American and Indian culture. Thus, getting herself trapped into dilemma of tension she turns herself into a mental wreck. The life of a house wife in New York feels destructive to her. When Dimple realizes there is a huge disparity between fantasy and reality she starts feeling alienated and isolated in the new surroundings. Unable to adjust in the new environment lacking the support of her husband she starts hating her husband. She suffers from insomnia, disillusionment, hallucinations etc. Amit is unable to understand the emotional need of his wife. She feels trapped in her torturing present. Although she gets acquainted with some of the Bengalis, she feels isolated. Against the wish of her husband she gets friendly with Ira Mullick, who is a Bengali but has completely adopted the culture of America. She gets fascinated by her. She even gets into an affair with a white American Milt. She is discouraged by her husband as well as by the Sens from consolidating with the populace of the new culture. The impediments of her surrounding and her incapability of learning a new language i.e. English contribute in holding back the change in Dimple. She is unable to remove the clutches of patriarchal Bengali culture in liberating herself. The inner conflict and confusion that Dimple goes through make her a neurotic patient. She does not want to live and imagines different ways of committing suicide. Finally, in a fit of disgust she kills her husband. She takes out knife from the kitchen drawer and choosing a spot near her husband's hairline she stabs him seven times. The number seven has symbolic implications in Hindu mythology. At the time of marriage the bride and the groom take seven vows while taking seven rounds around the holy pyre as witness and promise to remain with each other till eternity. Dimple stabs her husband seven times signifying to get liberty imposed to her by the institution of marriage. The murder

reminds one of Anita Desai's novel *Cry, the Peacock* where a strange sense of gap is felt between Maya and her husband and she ends up killing her husband.

Mukherjee's protagonist Dimple lives a tragic life, unable to cope up with the psychological turmoil of an immigrant wife and constant conflict of the imposed cultural roles Dimple gets mad and kills her husband. The life of Dimple reflects the status of a wife in an Indian household. In Hindu mythology the woman is the Devi or Goddess. She is Durga, Kali, Saraswati and Laxmi but the question that gets raised is 'Do we really consider the woman in our house as Devi?' Dimple faced alienation after reaching a foreign land but if she could have got the emotional support of her husband the picture would be different. This is a common experience felt by women in the contemporary society where husband and wife fail to understand each other. Marriage becomes a compromise rather than a cordial relationship of love and respect. Dimple wants to be different from regular Indian housewives. On one hand her husband wants her to be a good and devoting wife on the other hand he does not want her get too Americanized. Mukerjee intensely portrays the psyche of a young girl who undergoes various changes and dislocations. The two places where Dimple lives is extremely contrasting to each other, she moves from a countryside of Calcutta to a posh metropolitan area of New York. An Indian woman's experience as a diasporic subject begins in Fiji itself when she gets married and moves from her parents "home to the home of her in-laws." (Laksmi Kamala) It is here that she may first begin to experience identity loss. The novel is not only about immigration but a criticism of the male superiority in the conventional Indian structure of marriage where is considered as 'other'. The diasporic female character of Bharati Mukerjee's novel suffer from cultural dissimilarity while traveling across national boundaries with a dominant male counterpart. The double detachment fragments her soul, her feminine identity resulting in a violent end. Salman Rushdie describes a migrant's double vision, "being at the same time both an insider and an outsider in a society" (Imaginary Homelands 19).

Conclusion

Mukherjee has depicted a dilemma of belongingness in the novel 'Wife' exploring the problem of identity, alienation, nationality dislocation. The geographical and cultural displacement plays an important role in the life of an immigrant. Bharati Mukerjee is a writer who herself experiences nostalgia for her native land. She feels that mental violence has a lasting impact on a person than physical violence. In the novel Marriage and Immigration appear synonymous to Dimple. It proves a pleasant experience to only those who succeed in assimilating in a new environment. To conclude it can be said that Immigration is not always a delectable experience, it often leaves one devastated. Lack of love, intimacy, understanding and care results in this barrenness.

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