



## **Impact of Cultural Clashes and Migratory Experiences in Bharati**

### **Mukherjee's Wife**

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#### **Abstract**

The major concern of this paper is with the dislocation of an individual and the resulting crisis of identity in his/her personality. It concentrates on Bharati Mukherjee's second novel, *Wife* (1975). The tale describes an Indian wife who wishes to travel abroad and encounters an alien environment. It delves into a highly nuanced aspect of the immigrant experience. Mukherjee takes a more serious look at the challenge that an Indian woman Dimple's age and type suffers when she migrates to a culturally diverse country like America in this novel. Dimple's story begins in Calcutta and continues in the United States of America. Additionally, the loss, creation, or restoration of an effective identifying relationship between the self and the area they occupy is an issue. The paper seeks to demonstrate how dislocation caused by migration degraded a real and active sense of self and how this feeling was destroyed by cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious suppression of indigenous personality and culture by an allegedly higher racial or cultural model.

*Keywords: Self, Individual, Immigrant, Dislocation, Culture, Identity.*

### **1. Impact of Cultural Clashes and Migratory Experiences in Bharati Mukherjee's Wife**

Bharati Mukherjee, an American author of Indian ancestry, has established herself as a notable creative force in the field of English literature. She forges her own path through the heights of her artistry. Apart from being a feminist and outspoken on women's issues, she is an assertive writer on immigrant issues, never losing sight of her Indian roots and moral culture. Her works chronicle her changing vision of self. She has made a concerted effort in her books to construct the picture of immigrants asserting their claim to an American identity while valiantly attempting to establish themselves in a new cultural context.

Mukherjee's *Wife* delves deeper into the issue of immigrant experience. This novel picks up where the previous one left off. It revolves around the lives of a middle-class married Bengali woman who relocates to New York from Calcutta. She is married to an immigrant engineer, Amit Basu, who is not an American. This work can be seen as the story of an Indian wife who finds herself out of place in a distant nation surrounded by an alien culture. In his article on identity crisis of Indian immigrants, Shyam Asnani, "Identity Crisis in *The Nowhere Man* and *Wife*," remarks that.

*Wife* is also about displacement and alienation, for it portrays the psychological claustrophobia and the resultant destructive tendencies in that condition in Dimple Dasgupta - a young Bengali wife who is sensitive enough to feel the pain, but not intelligent enough to make sense out of her situation and breaks out. Dimple is entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between American culture and society and the traditional constraints surrounding an Indian wife, between a feminist's desire to be assertive and the Indian need to be submissive. (74)

Dimple's problem is her inability to create a balance between two worlds that are diametrically opposed: the one she left behind and the one she has come to inhabit. She is so dissatisfied with life that terms like anguish and pain, as well as her husband's loyalty, have lost their significance. Rather than that, she begins thinking about murdering her husband and committing suicide. Her separation from her husband and the environment is exacerbated by her transfer to America. Along with this estrangement, the pretence and outward glitter of American society contribute to her psychotic breakdowns.

Symbolically, the name Dimple denotes the psychic depression that has always been a part of her temperament but has been exacerbated by her geographical dislocation. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that she is much more than just depressed. The story of *Wife* is a distressing portrayal of the battle between Western and Indian cultures, as well as modern and traditional traditions, as exemplified in Dimple Basu's life.

The first pages of *Wife* depict Dimple as a college-going girl who is immersed in her private fantasy world and feeding her own complexes about herself. She dreams of a neurosurgeon as her husband and considers marriage as a blessing in disguise. Dimple views premarital life as a practise run for real life. Nothing makes her happier than the prospect of marrying a man who will supply her with all of life's luxuries and conveniences; therefore, her desire for a neurosurgeon as a husband. On the contrary, her father discovers Dimple's match in Amit Basu, a consultant Engineer. She also believes he is a better option than a doctor or an architect because he has applied for and is likely to receive emigration. She hopes that her far-flung ambition will come true in a far-flung place like America or Canada. She is overjoyed about her marriage and indulges in excessive buying. Dimple Dasgupta transforms into Dimple Basu, with all her ideas about marriage and a perfect husband. Prior to the marriage, she had a vivid memory of her own life; "an apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to new market for nylon saris" (3). However, becoming a Basu is a frustrating process. There is no such thing as liberty, no such thing as cocktail parties, and no such thing as genuine happiness. Amit is house on Dr. Sarat Banerjee Road is neither very huge or appealing.

From the beginning, Dimple does not feel at ease in that location. She believes that waiting for marriage is preferable to marrying. She despises Amit is mother and complains to her parents about the lack of amenities in her in-laws' house, including the fact that she must transport and store water upstairs in buckets. She spends the majority of her time engrossed in a beautiful word. She feels deprived of the liberties that a young housewife is expected to enjoy. She is not a fan of the drapes in the house. She had read in publications how newlywed young housewives always decorated their homes according to their preferences. She views choosing her own curtains as a form of liberty. She believes that her marriage to Amit has deprived her of all amorous yearnings that had been so deftly cultivated. However, she consoles herself by believing that all of these difficulties are temporary and that once her immigration application is approved, her difficulties will disappear. Still, she was fearful of some unknown fear in other countries.

Mukherjee depicts Dimple as having an extremely convoluted personality. Dimple, who is never content with what she now has, is a firm believer in a world beyond the present. Her fantasies of a wealthy life cause her to despise even Amit is attempts to make her happy. Amit takes her to a hotel, Kwality's, one evening. However, Dimple believes that Amit should have taken her to Trinca's instead.

He should have taken her to Trinca's on Park Street, where she could have listened to a Goan band play American Music, to prepare her for the trip to New York or Toronto. Or to the discotheque in the Park Hotel, to teach her to dance and wriggle. (21)

As a husband, Amit falls short of her ideal husband's standards. It would have been reasonable for her to describe an ideal husband prior to marriage, but as dissatisfied as Dimple is, she builds the man of her dreams while Amit is away.

When she becomes pregnant, a stage notorious for vomiting, an unexpected situation emerges for her. However, her nauseating proclivity is abnormal because she purposely vomits at all hours of the day and night. She experiences an odd sensation while vomiting. However, she is opposed to the pregnancy. Prior to marriage, she had never considered pregnancy or childbirth in her reveries. What could have been a most pleasant setting and a proud moment for a woman turns out to be a case of cheating, a case of cheating she never expected. Dimple's way of thinking reveals her character. She expresses her dissatisfaction to Amit. He is overjoyed with the news of her pregnancy. He begins planning the unborn child's future, but Dimple seems unenthusiastic.

Mukherjee portrays an immigrant in Dimple who is affected and moved by the Western World's superficiality. When they arrive at Jyoti Sen's residence, they are greeted by his wife Meena Sen. Dimple begins to pay close attention to the Sens' abode, bringing her eyes into contact with objects she had never seen yet desired in her previous life. She finds a framed batik wall hanging depicting King Ram and his court dressed magnificently. King Ram's wall hanging exemplifies Indians' efforts in America to maintain their cultural and religious traditions. For the Sens, Indian identity is a tangible type of identity that must be preserved in the face of the American invasion. However, what matters most to Dimple are the modern conveniences that only America can provide.

Dimple is unconcerned about practical issues like as racial discrimination and has not considered the possibility of an identity crisis in a strange location. When Jyoti is explaining the American mindset toward Indians and instructing Amit, she mentions their gorgeous furniture. Indeed, the Sens are very aware of their identity. They never invite an American to their home and never attempt to escape the ghetto, their miniature India surrounded by fellow Indian immigrants. They despise Americans because, according to Jyoti, they eat meat, are untrustworthy, and are never honest with Indians. The Sens' contempt for Americans and the English language is entirely consistent with the expats' sense of vulnerability. America is a temporary residence for the Sens. They intend to acquire as much money as possible during their stay. "I am going to retire when I am forty, go back and build a Five Lakh house and become the Maharaja of Lower Circular Road" (54). Thus, Jyoti Sen makes an endeavour to do so without jeopardising their Indian identity. Even in this distant place, they make an effort to maintain their cultural identity free of American influences.

Mukherjee also depicts an expatriate community in *Wife*, allowing us to examine the difficulties that immigrants encounter in an unfamiliar culture. The novel makes an attempt to answer questions such as: How do cultural clashes affect individuals differently? How does adaptation to a new environment depend on the immigrants' psyches? How does geographical dislocation cause extreme alienation in some immigrants, resulting in mental illness? Mukherjee addressed these issues seriously during her own expatriate experience. Their alienation in a distant land brings together these people from various states in India, and they form their own ghetto. They congregate on a regular basis for the purpose of refreshing their memories of India and revitalising their Indian spirit.

Dimple's violent outburst reveals her accumulated frustrations. Amit may also be blamed for her lack of awareness of her psychological requirement. He believes that supplying her physical luxuries is sufficient and pays little attention to her emotional needs. He rarely brings her outside their four-walled home. Rather than that, he advises her to venture out on her own, to establish friends, and to engage in useful work. He believes Dimple is depressed because she has developed a nostalgia for Calcutta and is constantly thinking about it. However, Dimple has difficulty going out alone and

establishing friends. One could argue that given her limited English skills, she could hardly have conducted herself effectively in such a large metropolis. America has surpassed her intelligence. She lacks an understanding of how to engage with Americans.

Dimple's juxtaposition of her husband and electrical appliances demonstrates that Amit has remained with her purely for convenience's sake. They have no emotional connection. She does not discuss her problems with him, nor does she inform him of her excessive daytime sleeping. Dimple desired to leave behind everything associated with her previous life and begin a 'fresh' life in America when she left Calcutta. She would fantasise about having a love relationship with Amit. Though there was some anxiety of the unknown at the start of this 'new' life, she had never anticipated such a pivotal period in her life. She has a difficult time relating to those who do not understand her culture. And her life has devolved into a nightmare since marrying a man from her own society.

In all situations, the author is concerned with the characters' disordered mental states as a result of their displacement, not with the consequences they encounter. For many critics, the novel's ending is disturbing. In "Bharathi Mukherjee's *Wife*: An Assessment," Ragini Ramchandra avers,

In whatever way her (Dimple's) response is interpreted, either as insanity or depravity it is totally unredeemed and the reader closes the book in utter disgust over the way the novel has tried to subvert the framework of an entire culture. (65)

Nonetheless, several critics acknowledge that *Wife* provides an unsettling portrayal of the battle between two cultures, Western and Indian.

In *Wife*, Mukherjee illustrates this type of dilemma in Dimple. Violence becomes the essential experience of American civilization for the protagonist. Mukherjee develops her theme "with complex irony and skill, transforming cultural symbols into surreal images of Dimple's final madness" (213). Dimple loses her mind when confronted by a culture she does not understand and which refuses to accommodate her. As a result of her acute loneliness and isolation, she loses even the semblance of confidence she possessed in Calcutta. She attempts to reconcile her displacement by adopting an American mentality by dressing as Marsha or by falling in love with Milt Glasser. However, each stride toward Americanization exacerbates her annoyance. The resulting psychological anguish manifests itself in desperate violent deeds.

Dimple's issue is complete rootlessness, since she is unable to reconcile her original Indian culture with her adopted American culture. Her dislocation renders her neither Indian nor American, but a befuddled traveller caught between two cultures who struggles to establish a distinct identity. In "Foreignness of Spirit: The World of Bharathi Mukherjee's Novels," Jain Jasbir says,

The novel traces the psychic breakdown of an Indian wife in America and the concomitant deep culture-shock leading to neurosis ... A waylaid traveller, 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 identify. (19)

## 2. Conclusion

To sum-up, Mukherjee's *Wife* depicts women whose lives have been wrecked by their migration experiences. There is also the issue of their survival. Their mental state has shifted, impeding their attempts at settling down. Displacement results in alienation and uncertainty about Dimple's existence in her instance. In her situation, acculturation occurs in the adaptation and acquisition of a new identity, as well as the formation of various real and imagined relationships. It symbolises her own accomplishment as an immigrant.

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