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## IDENTITY CRISIS IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S WIFE

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### ABSTRACT:

**T**he aim of the paper is to present the identity crisis in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife*. Her novels are window to the world of reality. Her novel depicts the tragic mental breakdown of a young Indian woman, Dimple who feels alienated in the alien land. She illustrates how an Indian woman is tormented in the alien land, not physically but mentally. Her protagonist Dimple is grown up between two cultures. At last, she is left with no culture and she thinks she is alienated. She does not talk about the loss of identity only and the land of free also. She discusses the life which is being insecure. She constructs her female protagonist is a highly sensitive and vulnerable woman. Cultural shock makes the protagonist to attempt suicide. Finally she turns to murder her own husband whom she married. This is happened because of the displacement of known culture to unknown culture. She shows the alienated women's survival and conditions through her novels. One can find the cultural differences and identity crisis in this novel. Thus, identity plays a vital role in her novel.

**KEYWORDS:** *Identity Crisis* , *Bharati Mukherjee's novel Wife* , *young Indian woman*.

### INTRODUCTION :

Bharati Mukherjee is a pioneer in writing with the density of detail. Her novels are the windows to the world of reality. She writes for a definite purpose. Her novel *Wife* depicts the tragic mental breakdown of a young Indian woman Dimple Dasgupta who feels alienated in the alien land. Like most of her novels, alienation is the main theme in the novel *Wife* also. She powerfully shows how an Indian woman is tormented in the alien land not physically but mentally. Her protagonist Dimple is caught between two cultures, finally she is left with no culture that she feels she is alienated. She sees the eccentric behaviour of Indian girls and boys in the migrated land. Ina, wife of Bijoy, is a fine example for how Indian woman get polluted them in the migrated land embracing the culture of the land where they are settled down.

Ina, an Indian woman, has become more American after landing in America. Her Indian identity has become powerful and to the more extent it has become nothing. She has lost her self-identity and she runs after American culture. She is in quest for foreign culture that she is addicted to the habit of smoking. In the party Dimple, Meena and Jyoti are discussing about Ina as, "I don't even want to say, Jyoti replied. "Bijoy is my friend, and Ina isn't really bad. But I will tell you this - she chain - smokes. "She's more American than the Americans" (W 68). Dimple does not want to emulate the track of others and she wants to retain her Indian identity. This attitude of dimple portrayed well by the author when Dimple was in the midst of people in the party. She found one arm chair and try to be aloof on seeing her silence people in order to monotonous of dimple they started to ask about her stay in Canada. Dimple replied to them with smiles. She observes what



happens around her; yet she is not provoked by the party atmosphere. Shyness is the basic quality of any Indian woman that she still preserves in her even in the foreign land where there is no space for shyness. Bijoy Mullick offered her a chair saying, "Please, please... "It is only a silly game; I will turn off the sound" (W 76).

The narrator very prettily sketches the status of Indian immigrants. They are totally submissive to the new location and culture which assures them money but nothing more. They want to have a luxurious life in the migrated land and they strive for achieving the cheapest goal. The pretension of Indian women in the farthest land is highly unimaginable. The migrated Indian women like to dress like American women they like wearing pant. When Jyoti, another immigrant, laughingly remarks, about Ina while attending the evening party as, "Ina Mullick will probably wear pants," (W 74). Dimple has no idea of wearing such an unfamiliar dress and she feels that it is against the custom and culture of India. As she sees Ina with the odd attire, she is amazed. Her amazement is described by the writer as "Dimple could not take her eyes off Ina Mullick. She was wearing white pants and a printed shirt that ended in a large knot" (W 74).

The Indian immigrants are ready to accept anything dumped on them in the foreign land. Their status in the new area is not up to the mark. Life is very insecure for them in the migrated land and yet they want to stay back there in the midst of phobia. It is apparent from the words of Ina Mullick to Dimple; "What you see, is a perfectly normal apartment that I'm frankly getting a little tired of, in a part of Manhattan that is neither safe nor convenient" (W 76). Immigrants live under fear and uncertain situation, no one is sure of their safety, always be with fear of being attack for no reason at all. Jyoti discusses about the incident she witness in Manhattan, she causally says, The problem isn't that A killed B while waiting to fill up his tank, but that A had a gun to kill with" (W 84). Even in the horrible atmosphere, they want to be in the migrated land and lead a miserable life and try to assimilate themselves in the land forever. In the new space, they hunger for what is new to them, what they have not attained so far and what appears to be strange. Through Ina, Mukherjee poignantly reveals the status of Indian immigrants in the land which does not respect immigrants. Bijoy talks about Ina's point of view as, "Ina has this theory about Indian immigrants. It takes them a year to get India out of their system. In the second year they've bought all the things they've hungered for. So then they go back, or they stay here and vegetate or else they've got to live here like anyone else" (W 76-77).

The very painful part of Indian immigrants is that they not only desert their motherland, but they make their parents out of their memory. They do not find space for travelling down to their native place and visiting their aged parents. In party, when Amit asked Mr. Mullick Prodosh whether he like to visit India any time, he would accompany him, so that he can visit his mother, for that Marshe replied that "He hasn't been in six years. He's afraid he couldn't adjust now, so we bring his parents over every summer. He's the only son, so it works out" (W 8). Instead of the visiting the parents, the parents were made to visit alien land in the old age. They being young, for them it very uneasy to visit once in a year, they never think about the difficulty face by their parents who had been in India for many years. On hearing that had spent only a week in America, looks at Pronob, as, an "ungrateful Bengali son." (W 81). They not only break their culture but also break the bond between parents and children.

The Indian culture teaches them affection and love which are missing in the alien land and when Indian children reach the Western land, they not only reject Indian identity, but also, their love on their parents. They do not want to come down to their motherland instead they force their parents to come down to the alien land where they are accommodated. This has become evident in the attitude of Prodosh Mookerji who has settled down in America along with his wife, Marsha Mookerji. He does not want to visit his parents in Calcutta, but forces them to visit him in America. Marsha tells Amit, "He hasn't been in six years. He's afraid he couldn't adjust now, so we bring his parents over every summer. He's the only son, so it works out" (W 81).

Mukherjee constructs her female protagonist Dimple as a highly sensitive and vulnerable woman. She does not take anything light-heartedly. She is not able to put up with even a slightest remark of her husband. When she tells Amit, "I feel very tired these days. I mean, I don't have the energy to baste the chicken every fifteen minutes, which is what the recipe calls for" (W 110). Amit replies, "It's probably because you eat so little" (W 110). He did not even look up from the paper. When he said this, this made Dimple lost the temper and she started to cry, "I feel a sort of dead inside and all you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You never

listen; you've 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" (W 110).

The protagonist gradually becomes violent losing her temper. She is preoccupied with the horror news told by her mates. She has no companion in the daytime that she watches television which makes her more panic as she watches the news which is full of horror and murder. She is in a painful situation that she suspects each and every sound and noise. Almost, she suffers hyperesthesia. She spends sleepless nights that make her weak. This is where she develops insomnia. Her insomnia is described as, "Between two and four in the morning she thought she heard men keep in front door...the men had baby faces and hooded eyes. She lies in bed, afraid to close her eyes and misses the men" (W 97). She feels that something must be eating her sense that she is not able to control her 'self'. She imagines suicide which she considers as the ultimate solution for all her troubles and pains: "Between three and four the next morning Dimple thought of seven ways to commit suicide in Queens diluted water" (W 102). But "Setting fire to a sari had been one of the seven types of suicide Dimple had recently devised" (W 116).

Dimple develops bitterness against her husband, "...she could not sleep he seemed unreal to her, like all sleeping people. She thought if she were to shut her eyes and listen for fumbling keys at the front door, she could make Amit die in his sleep" (W 97-98). At times she becomes so violent that she imagines herself killing her husband and hiding the body in the freezer, "She would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer" (W 195). She is pushed to the state of utmost alienation where she could only see the bleak side of life and gloomy atmosphere. When she sees all her expectations and curiosity go against her wishes, she is not able to control her anger and she becomes violent. She feels that she is not given the life she intended. She wants to have a life which is to promise her all luxuries she expects to have in the migrated land. She feels bitter about her marriage 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 dingy restaurants where they sold divine Kababs rolled in roti" (W 102).

The author portrays Dimple who tries to commit suicide, in the other hand Ina who does not have problem in assimilation. She describes, Ina is a bold woman who has lost her Indian identity in the American land. She dresses as she wishes and goes out with men as she pleases. Yet she attempts suicide. The narrator, through Ina character tries to bring out, that immigrant who forgoes their native culture and entirely submits themselves to American culture. Ina has lost her Indian identity in order to win American spirit. She or he has to surrender to the alien culture which alone determines the survival of the immigrants in the conflict land. Dimple wants to hold Indian identity forever. Now, an immense change can be seen in her attitudes. She is almost becoming an American. She forgets her home town Calcutta and she does not even dream of her town. She wants to be in America with a new identity. It is evident from her words, "If I could brood about Calcutta I'd be okay, wouldn't I? I mean, the trouble is I'm not even dreaming about Calcutta anymore" (W 112). Dimple feels newness in her. She attends cocktail parties and tastes beer. When she likes attending the parties Amit said, smiling "You're becoming American, but not too American, I hope" (W 112).

The heroine is not given full freedom by her husband Amit. He does not want her wife to wear pants and shirt like Ina does. He says, "I don't want you to be like Mrs. Mullick and wear pants in the house" (W 112). Mukherjee meticulously shows how Indian women in the migrated land slowly submit to Western culture and finally surrender their body to other men. Dimple does not get what she expects from her husband, Amit. She needs a true love from someone. Milt Glasser, brother of Marsha Mookerjee takes her to pizza corner. He says, "Come on Dimple", he urges, and she yielded to the pressure of his gloved hand rather than to the actual invitation to eat a pizza. She was amazed and horrified to see herself soft-shoeing her way with Milt over to the nearby pizzeria" (W 194).

Dimple feels guilty in going out with Milt and wants to tell her husband after two days. The very love encaptures Dimple to the ring of Milt and she is not able to respond against his will. She is total by submissive now to Milt and she becomes his sexual pleasure. She becomes aware that she is left with no culture Indian or an American. She struggles to identify her identity. As an Indian woman she must have been true and loyal to her husband; as an American woman she must have divorced her husband and gone away with Milt. Her Indianess had already gone as she embraced Milt. Now, she is left with only one option that is to be an American. If she

wants to have American consciousness, she would tell the truth to her husband and go away with Milt, parting Amit. Interestingly, she is caught between two cultures. She painfully quests for her identity and she is not able to find answer. The only option and answer she invents is that she kills herself. Her ever long anxiety of attempting suicide, suddenly turn to murder her husband whom she was loyal in the beginning of the immigrant life. Hence the author depicts the immigrant's alienation, identity crisis and how the protagonist is pushed to the different cultures in her novel.

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