

Cultural Multiplicity And Cultural Shock In Bharati Mukherjee's Wife

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Abstract:

In the twentieth century, immigration was one of the most prominent trends. With the onset of two global wars, the establishment of independent nations, and the rise of the internet, ideas like "home," "family," and "identity" have undergone radical transformations. Indian literature in the diaspora Literature from the diaspora is a byproduct of India's colonial and post-colonial past, during which a huge number of Indians left the country in search of employment in other nations. Dream characters from the diaspora often appear in Bharati Mukherjee's writings, including yearning, dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and depression. It is hoped that this research will provide light on how Americans interpret these political and social events. A new country has left Bharati Mukherjee's "Wife," the story's heroine, feeling alone and bereft. She, too, felt the effects of a culture shock when she arrived in a new country—alienated in the foreign land. She also experiences cultural shock in the new land.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Shock, Identity, Feminism

Introduction

The 'Grand dame' of diasporic Indian English literature, Bharati Mukherjee, is one of the most notable Indian women authors in English. Author of Asian-American and Indo-American fiction and non-fiction, Indian diaspora literature, immigrant fiction, and non-fiction, as well as contemporary mainstream American literature, she's been called many things. In the words of Clark Blaise, "Bharati has become one of America's best-known novelists and short-story writers." (Blaise and Mukherjee, "Prologue" to *Days and Nights*, vi). He believes American novelist Bharati Mukherjee might be considered "Lahiri's foremother" by Raj Chetty (2006). In the footsteps of V. S. Naipaul and Bernard Malamud, she became an expatriate writer like V. S. Naipaul and an immigrant writer like Henry Roth. She has acquired a reputation for studying the confluence of the Third World and the First World from the viewpoint of an immigrant to North America, Canada, and the USA.

T.S.Eliot, in his dissertation, "Notes Towards the Definition of Culture", says: "Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living" (13). Cross-cultural clash has made a quantum leap with science and innovation. People have begun to travel to other nations to fulfil their aspirations. Their goals. This movement has promoted cross-cultural and interracial sensitivity. Every culture has its own strong and weak points. The immigrants typically strive to find harmony between the original culture and the adopted one. This has resulted in psychological peculiarities that are strange to both civilizations. Hence, the answer to this difficulty is keeping one's culture as much as possible, even when living on foreign terrain.

In the current era of globalization, presenting a cross-cultural dilemma has become one of the key concerns of modern authors. Writers like Bharati Mukherjee fall within this genre. Being an immigrant, she was stuck between the competing cultures to build an identity of her own. This is best expressed in her works. She skillfully illustrates this trend in American culture as observed by immigrants in America in her writings. She said the following in an interaction with the Times of India:

We immigrants have fascinating tales to relate to. Many of us have lived in newly independent or emerging countries... when we uproot ourselves from those countries and come here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb two hundred years of American history and learn to adapt to American society... I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories (Oct 1989).

Mukherjee's heroines travel through the stages of expatriate doubt, immigrant confidence and eventually acquire the diverse global culture of the global citizen. This process of evolving identities offers the challenge of identity on many levels. In the aftermath of globalization, individuals have been travelling about across borders. We currently live in a world where cultural clashes and encounters are commonplace. It is here that this sort of investigation and its results would contribute to the knowledge and perspective of people, offering them insights into the phenomena of immigration. Over the past several decades, there has been a major outflow of women from India to the West for varied reasons. It has resulted in a new expatriate mentality because of many dislocations, and expatriate literature has been able to convert the stereotype of the suffering lady to an assertive or independent one. The female migrant subject engages in a persistent effort of self-removal from her original culture, which is tempered by a deliberate opposition to complete inclusion in the new host culture. She is stuck between cultures, and this sensation of in-betweenness or being contrasted sets before her a task to maintain a balance between her connections. The trauma of relocation and dislocations culminate in a new story of identity and the unique language of female expatriation. Bharati Mukherjee's distortions and separations described her own life and had an obsessive interest in capturing the immigrant experience in her works. Her encounters in India, Canada, and America have left an everlasting impact on her sense as a person and an artist. As Mukherjee explains to Chen and Goudie in their conversation:

I describe myself as ethnonationalism, and I'd say I am an American writer of Bengali-Indian origin. In other words, the writer/political activist in me is more obsessed with addressing issues of minority discourse in the U.S. and Canada, the two countries I have lived and worked in over the last thirty-odd years.[...] At this moment, my Calcutta childhood and adolescence offer me intriguing, incompletely-comprehended revelations about my hometown, my family, my place in that community: the kind of revelations that fuel the desire to write an autobiography rather than to mythologize an Indian national identity (Chen and Goudie 2014).

In her writings, Bharati Mukherjee has objectively represented women's emotional and physical concerns. They defied the past's abstract and social norms. They put much effort into understanding their characteristics and foresaw many images of women and their public position. They have discussed women from a new sociological perspective. In literature, a few female characters exhibit a dismissive and invalidating attitude toward Life, while others assert and acknowledge their presence with a trading-off approach, resulting in a deep sense of fulfilment. In this way, postmodern Indian women researchers provided an example of new research by attempting to debunk the notion of a male-dominated societal structure. They built a solid foundation in gender studies in English-language Indian literature. In her fiction, Bharati Mukherjee depicts a variety of women. To grasp these images, it is necessary to consider the feministic perspective mirrored in Indian English fiction. People throughout the globe think of America to be a connoisseur. The influx of individuals to this fantasy paradise has reached unprecedented heights. Migrants have difficulty adjusting to a new society and undergoing cultural change. They lose touch with their original culture as a result of this. In her quest for identification in a strange community, Mukherjee's heroine Dimple goes through a horrific process of culture shock in her second book, *Wife*.

Bharati Mukherjee's most famous book, *Wife* (1975), has generated many harsh remarks. In Canada, she went through a painful period when she wrote this. In her portrayal of Dimple, the novel's protagonist, there is a clear sense of isolation leading to a sense of dispossession. An immigrant's story of the loss of identity is the focus of *Wife*, a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award. Mukherjee visited India 10 years after her departure to the West. She just heard the question out of the corner of her eye. Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, what are Bengali women doing? (*Calcutta Days and Nights*). Her book *Wife* resulted from this experience, which impacted her artistic sensibilities. "Any slight surface depression" is the precise translation of the Bengali heroine's name Dimple, given to her by the writers of *Wife*. However, as the story develops, it becomes clear that she leaves more than just a mild sadness in the wake of her misfortune.

It's Dimple, a twenty-year-old Bengali girl from a middle-class family, who is the story's focus. She has a romantic inclination towards Life, a consequence of reading books and cinema magazines which make her ignore the harsh and horrible facts of existence. From the very outset, she is unique from other typical females. She has set her sights on marrying a neurosurgeon while her father seeks engineers in matrimonial advertising. Because of Indian

custom and patriarchal culture, it's difficult for an Indian woman to find her place in society. It is the feminine responsibility in a male-dominated culture to surrender her emotions and want her father's wishes. Thus she feels that marriage is a godsend in disguise which would provide her independence, money, and ideal pleasure, things she is too servile to ask for in her own family: "Marriage would bring her freedom, cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, and fund-raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love" (WF 3),

"An apartment in Chowringhee, her hair done by Chinese girls, trips to New Market for nylon saris," is what Dimple dreams about most of the time (WF 3). But at the same time, she sees herself as "Sita, the ideal Wife of Hindu legends," because of her conventional upbringing (WF 6). She feels that premarital living is a dress rehearsal for true Life. What pleases her most is dreaming about marrying a guy who would provide her with all the materialistic luxuries. Meanwhile, her father seeks a suitable guy for her. He is Amit Kumar Basu, a Consultant engineer. He has filed for immigration in Canada, and his employment application is waiting in Kenya. Dimple is delighted about her marriage, but her aspirations stay unsatisfied after marriage. Amit's mother wants to rename her daughter 'Nandini' instead of 'Dimple.' This feature of re-christening irritates Dimple, even though it is customary in Hindu culture. This is the first time she's had to hide her true identity. She worries whether taking on a new name would make her lose who she is. Is it possible for her to alter her identity or become a new person with a new word? Her mother-in-law has given her a new name, which she dislikes. She considers the flat to be tiny and unappealing; the sight of the injured crow is repulsive to her, but it is simply a passive resistance at this point: "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" (WF 30). She cannot connect herself with anybody in the family at this point, as she starts to recreate her 'ideal' guy based on the faces in magazines. Slowly, she realizes that marriage is not a natural fit for her. The fictional universe she had painstakingly and lovingly crafted began to disintegrate into little shards. She hates everything at her in-laws' house, and her displeasure frustrates her. As a result, her psyche changes. Her mother-in-law has given her a new name, which she hates. The apartment is dreadful, as is the interior design, and bliss eludes her head, and she despises the concept of becoming a Wife.

Dimple exhibits evidence of a cultural problem, which, in the end, is a domino consequence of her phobic state. Her forced self-abortion and her terrible killing of her husband, both depicted in the text, are typical of her struggle, which is bordered by the other and the self. Her female characters are seduced by the prospect of excitement, which they misinterpret as self-esteem and self. For many Indian females, America, which looks to be a free place, a real dreamland, is the conundrum of living. Dimple, who has never been taught the importance of marital Life and motherhood, responds in the other direction. She believes that being a mother would deprive her of the delights of living in other locations. As a result, she harshly aborts the baby. "She had skipped rope until her legs were numb and her stomach was burning, then poured water from the heavy pail over her head, shoulder, and tight light curve of her stomach." She'd spilt till the last drop of blood had washed away from her legs,

and then she'd fainted." (P.42) Dimple shows no guilt for her actions and is relieved because she will no longer be transporting any mementoes from her previous Life to the United States. This heinous deed exemplifies how The fantasy of relocation exacerbates Dimple's moral deterioration. Rosanne Klass comments:

"For an Indian Wife, childlessness is a disaster, pregnancy the achievement that seals her status. To overturn such ingrained values would involve a major emotional upheaval; yet Dimple acts on the vaguest aid, most defined impulses, and thinks more about it" (Klass 88).

Some critics, however, saw her self-abortion as "a sacramental of freedom from typically feminine roles and constraints." But whatever she does stems from a complete lack of understanding of Indian values and morals. Dimple arrives in the land of milk and honey with her goals and aspirations, devoid of Indian values. Despite her adventurous nature, Dimple is perplexed by American society. Nagendra Kumar describes her situation as follows: "How a boorish, an innocent Indian Wife can keep her nerves in a country where the murder was like flapping the bugs" (49). Dimple's response is understandable, given that she hails from a sheltered family; at first, Dimple suffers due to Amit's unemployment. Amit's job later makes her upset since he has little time for his Wife.

Mukherjee uses this work to demonstrate cross-culturalism by presenting Indian Americans and Americanized Indians. Sens, Mehras, Khannas, and Bhattacharya symbolize the former, while Mullicks represents the latter. In reality, Sens has been at Amit's side through thick and thin. The Indian Americans are proud of their heritage. Sens, for example, uses a framed batik wall hanging with an image of King Ram and his court to create an Indian atmosphere in their residence. Indian Americans are aware of their Indianness, while Americanized Indians are mindful of their oneness with foreign culture. Ina Mullick, who wears "pants and mascara" and is "more American than the Americans," exemplifies this mindset. Despite the Sens' warnings about Ina's bad influence on Dimple, a lady with misconceptions about American society falls victim to Ina's enigmatic attraction. Dimple is left befuddled and disillusioned by the novel's conclusion.

Amit and Dimple are frustrated on different levels; while Amit's joblessness gives him the creeps, Dimple feels that her marriage is doomed. She was enraged because her marriage had deceived her and failed to offer her with all of the glitzy things she had hoped for; "had not brought her cocktails under canopied skies and 3 A.M drives to dingy restaurants where they sold divine kababs rolled in roti". (WF 102) She despises Amit because he hasn't lived up to her expectations. He isn't the guy she had hoped for. Dimple is depressed and supports Meena Sen while watching TV or reading newspapers. She is exposed to violence via the media. In addition, she hears more about murder, trafficking in the building's basement, and other crimes. As a result, she is always in the dark. In marriage, communication skills are essential. Padmini Singh ends in a 'Women's Era' essay on "saying what you want and anticipate from your husband": "communication between husband and Wife is essential to marital happiness. So, be bold enough to communicate your feelings and views. This is how

you are to go about it”(WF 24). Amit and Dimple cannot articulate their true love for one other after being introduced to another culture. This communication breakdown creates a chasm between the pair that expands day by day, eventually destroying their partnership.

After Amit gets work, the situation worsens. He spends more time on his job. He is unable to comprehend Dimple. He feels that just offering financial comfort would satisfy her. The couple relocates to a well-equipped apartment with all of the latest equipment. The couple’s living situation improves, yet they remain lonely. Dimple attempts but fails to integrate into American culture. “It’s difficult for her to adjust to idiots who don’t realize Durga Puja,” she says (WF 114). Dimple is so distressed by her new Life in America that she injures Amit with a knife when he approaches her from behind. She apologizes to Amit and faults America for getting her jittery: “This would not have happened if we stayed in Calcutta. I was never so nervous back home” (WF132).

Every quarter of Dimple’s existence is filled with loneliness. She goes to the media to get rid of the sensation. T.V. is her only buddy. She is so enamoured with the media that she becomes preoccupied with phrases like dark, evil, ominous, horrible, murder, suicide, mugging, and so on. She has complete faith in the media. “Her body seemed strangely alien to her, filled with hate, malice, and an insane desire to punish, yet light, almost airborne,” says the author (WF 117). Linda Sandier expresses her emptiness in this way:

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 (Sandier 84).

The alien civilization has enraged Dimple’s soul, and she has begun to act out. To fuel her rebellious spirit, she begins mingling with Ina Mullick and Milt Glasser, wears Marsha’s clothing, and goes to the length of enjoying the illegal freedom. She adopts Marsha’s tinted spectacles because: “The purple-tinted sunglasses are perhaps the most typical index of American culture. For Dimple, they are a masquerade, borrowed from the West, exactly like Marsha’s clothing and the flat in which she is living” (Janet 98).

She persuades Milt in her bedroom and conceals it from Amit to top it all. Dimple’s behaviours are entirely a product of her quest to get one with American society. In the end, she succumbs to her neuroses. She protests 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 chimaera...she was furious, desperate; felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster...” (WF 56). Amit observed the outward changes in Dimple, and he connected them to culture shock. He even says he’ll accompany her to India. But nothing affects her essence. The impact of the media on Dimple’s Life takes a nasty turn. She considers the murder of her husband: “He 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” (WF 195).

Dimple devises ten alternative methods to take her Life. She gets psychotic, sees her body and soul separate. She suffers from imagined sickness and gets sleepless. She fails to

discriminate between reel life and the actual world. She has an emotional breakdown, which Amit fails to notice. No matter how hard Dimple tries to integrate the foreign society, the Indian ideals resting entrenched inside her condemn her over the extramarital connection with Milt. When she murders her spouse in a condition that resembles a dream, his decline is complete. Dimple would not have endured such embarrassments had she remained in India. She would have learned to reconcile herself to her disappointments. She would not have been a murderess. In reality, there is no mystery in her becoming a murderess since in America, “talking about killing is like talking about the weather” (WF 161).

Wife Bharati Mukherjee’s first book is noted for its profound investigation of its protagonist’s psychology. Both Bharati Mukherjee and Dimple, a migrant, slowly catch up with locals. Dimple’s personality, rather than the continual reminder of language, physical distinctions, and the loss of the original place, adds to the mysterious appeal of the integration process. Mukherjee has focused on the disillusionment of the female protagonist in this story. She has a mental illness as a result of the cultural struggle. She writes, “The end of the story encapsulates both the strength of her spirited struggle to refashion herself and the difficulty of achieving wholeness when one is stretched between two cultures”.

Conclusion

Women's personal life has undergone dramatic physical and mental transformations due to marriage and travel abroad. Despite their apparent capacity to adapt, the initial shock they experience is essential. Because they were all born and raised in India, they all have a strong desire to break free from the constraints of their culture and lead a more Western lifestyle, but at the same time, they see it as a fantasy. They talk a good game about feminism and emancipation but struggle to put it into practice. For all of Mukherjee's females, it appears that this is the most challenging aspect of their existence.

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