

## Identity Crisis in *Wife* : A Psychological Perspective

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**Abstract.** The traumatic situations and agonies are psychological terms which are generally found in the works of Indian diasporic writers. In Indian English literature, Bharati Mukherjee is a famous writer who presented these terms prominently in her novel "Wife". In this novel, she focused the diasporic experience of her protagonist, Dimple with the isolation, alienation, culture clash, cross cultural crisis, multicultural identity and identity crisis. Therefore her novel reveals the sensibilities of immigrants with a close observation. Identity Crisis is core issue for the immigrant who struggles to maintain it in the other foreign land. Identity Crisis happened under the pressure of geographical, economic, political, and cultural issues. Wife not only portrayed the psychological eccentricities of the protagonist, but also focuses on the strength of women who are ready to face any kind of situation which takes place in the life. Psycho-analytical theory used to present the different behaviours and manners of the character, Dimple Dasgupta.

**Keywords :** Traumatic situations; diaspora; alienation; identity-crisis; eccentricities.

The Modern world is a world of fragmentation where everyone is struggling to make a unique identity. But if we talk about the identity of women, which is always questionable in this globalised world, still they are searching their identity. Bharati Mukherjee's novel "Wife" is a real picture of identity crisis which comes due to migration. According to Freud, different levels of the psyche such as Id, ego, and superego make transformation in personalities of human beings. If people live in sadness, depression, agony and anxiety, these psychological things mould the identity of a particular person. In this novel, we find that Dimple also lives in sadness, isolation and fantasy world and neglects the real world that surrounds her. The Dream is an unconscious level of mind where the man is lost in dreams which connects with desire, wish, and feeling. Identity is, "the fact of being or feeling that you are, a particular type of person, organization, etc. different from others". (Cambridge Dictionary) When a feeling came into mind that what am I and what should I do to pertain to my identity, such kind of question always troubled the immigrants. So Identity crisis is," a theme which is used by the various

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writers who have moved abroad once or twice in their lives.”(Cambridge dic.).Identity is a dynamic process in the contact of social interaction. The Identity of a particular person encounters with others or new circumstances in which the status and role of a person is challenged and leading to incongruance. Stuart Hall discussed cultural identities in his essay, "Cultural Identities and Diaspora" that it is a matter of becoming as much as being and belongs to the future as much as to the past.

Identity crisis is a term which is coined by a theorist Erikson and refers to the self analysis and self- inspection in different cultural and geographical milieus. In the early 21st century, an estimate of 10 percent of human beings lived in diasporic circumstances. The Diasporas have some problems regarding expatriates, homelessness, nostalgia, cultural crisis, multiculturalism, and identity-crisis. In post globalisation period, many writers known as Diaspora tried to analyse their identity after coming into contact with several cultures. Those who migrated to the other country, were treated as marginalised and faced problem to Cultural Identities, e.g. V. S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Anjana Appaachana, Kamala Markandaya and Bharati Mukherjee. Among those Indian diasporic writers, Bharati Mukherjee is a prominent writer. Her works represent the theme of diaspora in terms of migration sensibility, homelessness, nostalgic feeling, multicultural identity and identity crisis etc.

She was born on July 27, 1940, in Calcutta, India, to an upper middle class Hindu Brahmin family. Her parents are Sudhir Lal Mukherjee and Bina Banerjee Mukherjee. In her childhood, she visited Europe. In 1947, her father moved to England with his family, where she came in contact with the English language. She dreamed being a writer in her childhood days. So she enrolled in the Iowa writer's workshop, and got M.F.A. degree and came back to India. Her father was a conservative who believed in arranged marriage. He forced her to marry in a traditional way, but she abruptly married Clark Blaise, a Canadian writer, during her M.F.A. workshop. In 1972, she became a permanent resident of Canada. There she completed her first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*. Through these novels, she depicted her close observation and experience from Bombay to Canada. She encounters Eastern and Western cultures during her journey. Bharati Mukherjee's novels mostly deal with the issues of the sense of identity- crisis, which comes through the sense of displacement. In the same way, Dimple Dasgupta, who is a middle-class Bengali woman moved from Calcutta to New York. From the beginning of the novel, the protagonist faced an identity crisis as the

wife of Amit Basu. Dimple is very innocent about the different cultures of the foreign land. She expressed her fear and pain when she thought about the settlement in America, saying that, "she had expected pain when she had come to America, had told herself that pain was part of any new beginning, and in the sweet structures of that new life had allotted pain a special place. But she had not expected her mind to be strained like this, beyond endurance. She had not anticipated inertia, exhaustion, or endless indecisiveness". The female characters of Bharati Mukherjee's novels depicted the real picture of those Indian women who go through the sensibility of anxiety in contemporary society. The writer showed the neurotic phenomenon in the character's behaviour. Bharati Mukherjee once said that she visited Calcutta after her marriage; there she got the idea for this novel as, "quite by an accident, I heard the question that shaped my second novel' what do Bengali girl do between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one..."(*Wife*, 12) In the opening line of the novel, Dimple believes, "marriage would bring her freedom, Cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, funds- raising dinners for noble charities. Marriage would bring her love". (13) Sometimes she behaves very strongly because Amit Basu is not the man to whom she had imagined for her husband, "She borrowed a forehead from an aspirin ad, the lips, eyes and chin from a body- builder and shoulders ad, the stomach and legs from a trousers ad and put the ideal man".(23)

This incident reveals that she was mentally disturbed and has nostalgic feeling related to her past identity. Here at the residence of Amit Basu she does not feel comfortable because his house is not big and attractive. Her mother-in- law did not like Dimple's name so she gave her the new name Nandini. From here, she feels that her identity is lost in this world and lives in depression. V. S. Naipaul presents a description of identity in his essay that, "where do you come from?" It is the Indian question... (of) people who think in terms of the village, the district, the province, the community, the caste". She feels happiness in her imagination and creates a beautiful world in her fantasy. *Wife* is a story that handles the theme of migration and identity- crisis. Dimple is about to migrate but she does, "not to carry any relics from her old life". (42) But this event again showed her memory of the past. One day, Dimple goes to the market with MeenaSen and desires to buy cheese cake. Her fear checks her not to go alone to the shop, but when she was assured by Meena Sen. She went and saw the jar of pickles, hanging salamis, pink roost beef, roost duck and turkey etc. After sometime, she asks for cheese cake and the shopkeeper starts gazing at her with great embarrassment.

She cannot understand the feelings of the shopkeeper and repeats her statement. Here, she recalls those days when she used to go to the shops of Calcutta and said, "In Calcutta she had buy from Muslims, Biharis, Christians, Nepalis. She was used to many races, she'd never been a communalist"(60). She feels for first time that the community of America has left a psychological impact on her identity. She escaped from the harsh reality of life and wanted to live in fantasy world. All her dreams burst as the bubbles of water when she realises that she is pregnant. She decided to get rid of her pregnancy by killing that tiny creature without any reason:

She had skipped rope until her legs grew numb and her stomach burned; then she poured water from the heavy bucket over her head, shoulders, over the tight little curve of her stomach. She had poured until the last of the blood washed off her legs; then she had collapsed. (42)

The description of her abortion is very poignant and touching. How she did this act without mercy, this action puts a question to her identity as a woman. She thinks that the old things will remind her of her past identity and raise her frustration, irritation, and agonies. Dimple wants to stay away from the traditional customs and culture of India. So Bharati Mukherjee very skillfully presents the experience of those women who were forced to confront their marginalisation with her own (Indian) culture, while attempting to make a false identity within an alien (American) culture. In the party at Vinod Khanna's place, she encounters many Indians who behave as, "little Indian". People as the Sens, Mehra, Khannas and Bhattacharya and Miss Chakravorty are talking like Dimple. All reveal their disgust and hatred for American cultures, food, and habits etc. Dimple proves that she cannot forget her Indian culture in a foreign land. Her inner feelings provoke her to join the American lifestyle and culture as Ina invites her to a party where she offers wine and there is a hidden desire in Dimple to drink. She is aware of Indian culture and that Indian women do not allow drinking like foreigners. Bharati Mukherjee reflects that our identity reveals our culture and tradition, if we lose our identity it means we lose our culture. So here Dimple is in a traumatic situation and cannot make right decision about whether her past identity is best or present. Identity crisis comes due to immigration and displacement. We see what happened with those immigrants who left their home, their languages and their culture behind them. Subsequently

the condition of the children of those immigrants is problematic, as they are between two distinct cultures, often with opposing values. Dimple of *Wife* feels uprooted when she settles in America with her husband and struggles to find her place in a new country with a new social framework. She physically settled in America but mentally attached with her native land and memorised all those things that are related to her culture and identity. Her friend, Paramita Ray, commonly known as Pixie gave her magazines for reading. She has seen in those magazines how,

“Young marrieds” were always going to decorate and selecting “their colours, especially their bedroom colours. That was supposed to be the best part of getting married: being free and expressing yourself”(20), ‘The Sens’ who is related to her husband, AmitBasu, showed disgust with the foreigners and their languages which is quite in keeping with the feeling of insecurity as an ‘expatriate’. Dimple always lives in fear-everything terrifies her. So she engaged herself in watching television and spent her time to building a castle in the air. With the passage of time, she totally neglects the reality and detaches from her husband and becomes accustomed to uncanny and strange manners. The furious outbursts of Dimple present her extreme level of frustration. She is also suffering from an inferiority complex about her fair complexion and the fact that her chest is not much developed. These things showed her psychological feelings regarding her identity. On the other side, she joins Meena Sen in domestic work and spends more time spent in watching TV or reading newspapers. She always lives in terror when she hears about murder and smuggling in the apartment building. She is afraid of the policeman, “was scared of the policeman; they just did not look inoffensive, like the ones back home”(41). The novel “*Wife*” disclosed the quest of Dimple, the thwarted dream, dislocation and isolation leading to marital stress, the demand of a new and hostile cultural environment, the loss of supportive community and the loss of relatively coherent earlier identity. One day Dimple reveals her frustration over Amit, for instance, “I feel sort of dead inside and you can do is read the paper and talk to me about food. You never listen; you have 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”. (110) So such behaviours by Dimple show her inferiority complex and frustration. Dimple has no idea about the English language of America so she felt ashamed to speak English and understand the sense of others, “How could she live in a country...where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevation?” (112) Therefore she has confined herself in the four walls of the apartment and loves to her fantasy

world. At time came when she could not bear isolation and frustration. She is filled with darkness, evil, sinister, gruesome thinking like murder. There is only one way of life left which leads her to commit suicide. She has many complaints against life:

Life should have treated her better, should have added and subtracted in different proportions so that she was not left with a cinema. Amit was no more than that. He did not feed her reveries; he was unreal. She was furious, desperate; she felt sick. It was as if some force was impelling her towards disaster, some monster had overtaken her body, a creature with serpentine curls and heaving bosom that would erupt indiscreetly through one of Dimple's orifices, leaving her, Dimple Basu, splattered like a bug on the living-room wall and rug. The cataclysm embarrassed her.(156).

The violence of Dimple is overloaded. She could not bear more of it so she had murdered her husband without thinking about its results:

She sneaked up on him and chose a spot, her favourite spot just under the hairline, where the mole was getting larger and browner, and she drew an imaginary line of kisses because she did not want him to think she was the impulsive, foolish sort who acted like a maniac just because the husband was suffering from insomnia. She touched the mole very tightly and let her fingers draw a circle once, twice seven times, each time a little harder, until the milk in the bowl of cereal was a pretty pink and the flakes were mushy and would have embarrassed any advertiser, and then she saw the head fall off but of course it was her imagination because she was not sure any more what she had seen on TV and what she had seen the private screen at three A.M. - and it stayed upright on the counter-top, still with its eyes averted

from her face, and she said very loudly to the knife that was redder now than it had ever been when she had chopped chicken and mutton with it in the same kitchen and on the same counter... Women on television got away with murder. (212-13)

After committing this heinous act she felt free from the entanglement of the orthodox tradition of marriage. She also commits suicide. Dimple is the victim of her neurotic sensibility of identity-crisis due to expatriation.

Thus, Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Wife* proves itself as a novel of identity crisis. With the help of Dimple, she draws a picture of eccentricities of a middle class woman who is not able to maintain her problem of alienation. Thus Dimple's mental abnormality leads her to kill her husband and herself too. Bharati Mukherjee reveals the pains, miseries, loneliness, rootlessness, and anxiety of the people who moved abroad to fulfil their dreams, freedom, happiness and the opportunity for a good job. They lost their self-identity, culture and language because they could not keep control of their behaviours and manners.

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