



A Study Of Migration And Identity In Bharati Mjuherjee's Fiction, Wife, Using Postcolonial, Feminist And Diaspora Theories With Particular Reference To Indian Women Migrants.

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Bharati Mukherjee's novels understandingly portray the predicaments of women who migrate to the United States and Canada. She sympathetically discusses convincingly the situation of the migrants: the problems of isolation, alienation and exile they endure in their chosen nation state. Her women characters remake themselves in extremely stylish multinational societies, like Canada and America, where they are snubbed and regarded as tedious, second class residents.

Fiji Indian women migrants face the problems, discerned by Bharati Mukherjee in her fiction, from the very moment of their departure from Fiji. These problems continue for them after their arrival in the countries of their choice, and afterwards.

This paper discusses Bharati Mukherjee's writing because of this relevance to migrants today. Generally, migrants move from country to country in search of what they perceive as a better standard of living. The aim of my paper is to attempt to relate the many different problems which confront women migrants in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Wife*, to those problems which confront Fiji Indian women migrants today. It aims to discuss the pain of exile, alienation and isolation, and conversely, the ultimate liberation of transformation which is an integral part of migration.

I have chosen to write on one of the fictional writings of Bharati Mukherjee in relation to women migrants and with particular reference to the Fiji context. Bharati Mukherjee is a post-colonial writer, born in India, who later married and settled in the United States. The recurring themes *are* migration and Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's fiction, *Wife* because of its relevance to Indian women migrants today.

Bharati Mukherjee's novels understandingly portray the predicaments of women who migrate to the United States and Canada. She sympathetically and convincingly discusses the situation of the migrants: the problems of isolation, alienation and exile they endure in their chosen nation state. Her women characters remake themselves in extremely stylish multinational societies, like Canada and America, where they are snubbed and regarded as tedious, second class residents.

Fiji Indian women migrants face some of the problems discerned by Bharati Mukherjee in her fiction from the very moment of their departure from Fiji and even before. These problems continue for them after their arrival in the countries of their choice, and afterwards.

Generally, migrants move from country to country in search of what they perceive as a better standard of living. The aim of my paper is to attempt to relate the problems which confront

women migrants in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, *Wife*, to those problems which confront Fiji Indian women migrants, to a greater or lesser degree, today. It aims to discuss the pain of exile, alienation and isolation, and conversely, the ultimate liberation of transformation which is an integral part of migration.

Wife (1975) is about immigration, and also about male superiority. In this novel, the conventional Indian structure of prearranged matrimony which positions women in a second-rate role in a patriarchal custom is criticized as well. It is these organizations of dominance which the diasporic female subject in Mukherjee's *Wife* has to clash with in her challenge to travel across nationalized boundaries, and cultural dissimilarities.

Mukherjee's essential involvement in this novel is to fictionalize the dilemmas of South Asian women migrants. She accepts the authority of revealing the trivial and essentially imperceptible world of migrants to North America from Third World countries. These immigrants disregard their long-established traditional origins and turn up in the New World contemplating the possibility of accumulating wealth, achieving success, and experiencing independence only to discover themselves entangled in a struggle between their old traditional belief arrangements and the New World civilization. Mukherjee amplifies the clash in their contacts of ordeal and victory. Russell Schoch in a conversation with Mukherjee notes:

that she did not like the life of a dark-skinned, non-European there (in Toronto) – she was thrown out of hotel lobbies when not accompanied by her white husband, and to the back of a Greyhound bus, and spat upon.

Bharati Mukherjee's essay, "An Invisible Woman", chronicles her struggles in Toronto, Canada specifically as something that constituted "double vision" since her self-consciousness was

place so completely at out of the ordinary with her societal status (Schoch, 2009: 1). This essay spells out in numerous fashions the concerns which are at stake in Mukherjee's *Wife*. The protagonist, Dimple Dasgupta, like Mukherjee, encounters individuality confrontations throughout the diverse cultural vigour that powerfully control her self-awareness and withholds the techniques to manage her personal existence.

This work of fiction further attempts to illustrate how these concerns create intense psychological consequences. Dimple's actions of violent behavior, for example, abortion, vomiting, self-destruction delusions and finally the killing of her husband, Amit, are replies to her short of authority over self-image and her defiance to turn into a sufferer of her situations. The novel deliberates the psychological outcomes of conflicting cultural locations on a diasporic subject. *Wife* is situated in two immensely conflicting geographic surroundings: countryside Calcutta covered in dust and the New York City, a refined metropolitan area. Owing to this, Dimple's knowledge as a diasporic subject becomes resolutely more challenging. Dimple's replies to the psychological effects of these differing settings are made clear. The novel is a migrant description, records the cultural bewilderment and ultimate estrangement, and in precise, the psychological worsening of a youthful Hindu wife who migrates to the United States with her husband.

In *Wife*, Bharati Mukherjee describes the psychosomatic representation of a youthful Bengali woman, who, in her great effort to adapt to a fresh and completely unfamiliar culture, experiences agonizing societal, cultural and psychosomatic transformations. Her sensitive sensibility of dislocation and steady decline into complete estrangement are presented penetratingly into focal point.

Wife as the name advocates is the narrative of a wife. The protagonist, Dimple Dasgupta, develops, matures, revolts, and murders in this novel. Bharati Mukherjee takes us intensely into the psyche of Dimple as she establishes a changeover from being unmarried to wed a husband chosen by her father. The novel also portrays an additional intermediary circumstance when Dimple shifts from the recognizable neighbourhoods of Calcutta to New York, which is recognized as an aggressive city.

As the work of fiction proceeds the concealed insecurity of Dimple's individuality discloses itself. The immature, youthful wife, Dimple, in a prearranged matrimony, attempts to bring together the Bengali exemplary of a flawless submissive wife with the requirements of her new American life, but she needs the internal courage and backing to deal with in New York City. Mukherjee reveals the impediments which take place from being flung between two nations and the fortitude and courage it takes to get through. The repression Dimple endures in both Calcutta and New York and her efforts to be the perfect Bengali wife baffles her. Out of dread and own insecurity she eventually kills her husband, Amit.

Dimple is looked upon as feeble since she is ineffective in making the changeover from one nation to the other. She is dispirited by her American anchor family, the Sens, and her husband Amit, from integrating communally with populace of other cultures. This and her incapability to gain knowledge of English are physically powerful contributing features in holding back the change. Dimple is immobilized to liberate herself from the ties of Bengali culture to entirely take pleasure in an innovative living in America. The novel's focal point is on her sensitive feel of dislocation and steadily shifts in the direction of her entire estrangement, and the emotional disorders which finally conclude in her assassination of Amit.

I will now relate the text *Wife* to the subject of my paper.

Like Dimple, Fiji Indian women, are diasporic subjects who must relocate and find a new social/cultural space, and in the process are confronted with many problems.

One such problem is Homeland Diaspora.

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'. It is here that she may first begin to experience identity loss.

A young married woman fantasizes her arranged marriage, assuming it will bring freedom and love. The reality of her marriage, however, is a rude awakening. It has been noted that in some cases a husband ignores the wife's wishes completely in all matters. In many Fiji extended family households, husbands listen to their mothers and give very little of their time and attention to their wives. The husband expects his wife to dress and behave according to his mother's demands even to the extent, in some cases, of her foregoing paid employment to become a full-time housewife. A wife may resent the loss of personal identity incurred by her mother-in-law's domination and her husband's total disregard for her feelings but she suppresses her anger and resentment. The psychological effect of such treatment takes root right here.

An Indian woman is brought up in a patriarchal domination culture where marriages are generally arranged by parents, especially, the father. She makes a transition from being single to marrying a husband not of her own choice. The husband assumes authority and the wife is expected to submit. This initial erosion is the beginning of a mental strain which ends in the catastrophic eruption of violence for many.

The traditional Indian system of arranged marriages places Fiji Indian women in an inferior role in a patriarchal culture. It is this structure of domination which the diasporic female subject has to struggle against in her attempt to move across national borders, and cultural differences.

Another transitional situation is when an Indian woman moves from the familiar surroundings of Fiji to New Zealand, Australia, Canada or America which are perceived as developed metropolis. The diasporic woman has been in an inferior role in a patriarchal society due to the traditional Indian system of arranged marriages and hence finds it difficult to adjust to the new surroundings and new culture. These immigrants leave their homeland and arrive in their new countries in search of success and wealth but find themselves entangled in a conflict between their traditional beliefs and the new culture. There is conflict in their experiences of trauma and triumph.

A woman is powerless to free herself from the shackles of Indian culture to fully enjoy a new life overseas. Her acute sense of displacement gradually moves towards her total alienation, and psychological disturbances: depression, suicidal tendencies and sexual promiscuity. Many Fiji Indian women migrants have suffered depression and committed suicide or indulged in extra-marital affairs. Through the media, the public has become aware of instances where Indian women who migrated with such high hopes and dreams have had them shattered. Marriages have ended disastrously. Husbands have harmed their wives; or wives have harmed their husbands, even to the extent of killing them.

Dimple experiences both, her own and borrowed cultures on her entrance in New York: the cloistered familial world of Indians in Queens, and the highly flashy celebrations of the prosperous Americanized Indians in Manhattan. The subjects of tête-à-tête are habitually the

Indians' personality and combined anticipations of creating an achievement of living in America and the shortcomings of livelihood in the United States: the elevated felony amount in the avenues of New York, and the price of goods. It is not trouble-free for her to find her societal position in America. She does not get the occasions to mingle with people of other cultures, only with the Indians already living in America. This strengthens her cultural ties, as she is most emphasized of her Indian-ness amongst the Americanized Indians. Dimple is battered by their style. Diminished by Indian patriarchal culture, Dimple is in the same way lost in her adopted culture.

Many Indian women migrants from Fiji face similar circumstances in their adopted countries. They tend to confine themselves socially to their own ethnic group instead of integrating with people of the host country which would make the transition into a new culture easier. It prevents them from experiencing life outside of that circle which would shape their view of the metropolitan society. Their failure to breach the cultural barrier and find their place within the framework of a foreign culture is perhaps worsened by their inability to speak the language of either the westernized Indians with its colloquialisms and its assumed linguistic features, or the local language. The women feel inadequate and unable to express their feelings, and to genuinely articulate either their experience or their identity.

Dimple, in *Wife*, is fascinated by liberated Indian women who have become Americanized in their ways. Many Fiji Indian women migrants seem to share this fascination. They emulate the dressing, mannerisms and *patois* of the Westernized Indians. They grow to be more westernized than the westerners themselves. The clash of culture is initially slight and amusing but the effects accumulate to become a considerable shock to their fragile psychological strength which

fractures, sometimes leading to heartbreak. Indian society even in Fiji is excessively strict. Many parents control their children's marriages and exert a powerful influence on most of their major life decisions. This actually provided them with clear behavioural guidelines. By contrast, in their adopted countries there appears to be so much freedom that they lose their sense of direction and are swamped in it.

The Women's Liberation Movement in western countries advocates equal rights for women in all areas. This is foreign to Indian women. Many accept this ideology as a form of resistance to the limitations of Third World Feminism. Those who cannot, remain outsiders. This exposes the clash between Western and Third World Feminisms. Jody Mason argues in 'Articulating Violence' (2001), that Western feminism does not take into consideration cultural nuances of the Third World. It constructs a Third World Eurocentric subject.

In *Wife*, the indifference for cultural nuances is addressed by Mukherjee through Ina Mullick's struggle. Ina Mullick, a married Bengali woman migrant to America, is settled in New York. In Dimple's eyes, Ina symbolizes liberated Western feminism. Mason further argues that Western feminism and its blatant "liberation" fail to provide Ina with a satisfying sense of self. Ina continues to be subjugated because Western feminism is incapable to adequately deal with the contradictory cultural and societal systems that correspond to her position as "Indian" and "American" at the same time. Ina and Dimple endure not only the patriarchy of the industrialized developed nation; they also have to battle with the personalities which have been shaped by their individual cultural backgrounds. From Ina's admittance it is seen that she supposes she is imitating the American ways, rather than in reality living a life which might give power. In admitting the divergences between East and West, Ina hinders the options of being both. Rather than

assimilating the Eastern and Western feminism and accommodating the two to create a new feminism that does not negotiate her Indian-ness, she has turns out to be a cheap simulation. The Fiji Indian women are confronted with a similar situation and, many of them, like Ina, lose their sense of direction and become cheap imitations of Western feminism.

Another problem faced by many Indian women is unwanted pregnancy. Traditionally Indian husbands at no time feel the necessity to discuss with their wives their feelings about having the baby. The wife is forced to suppress her helplessness and distress at the pregnancy. Husbands regard their wives as just chattels to submit to their domination. Indian women in general desire to break away from established cultural norms that debase them, but held up as the symbol of "virtue", it is their feminine duty to suppress their feelings and submit to the will of their husbands. As a diasporic feminine subject, an Indian woman inwardly reacts against this idea, and the suppression of her emotions, may later lead to dire psychological consequences for her. Indian women are 'doubly colonized'.

My paper has made clear the problems faced by many Fiji Indian women migrants. Changes that have taken place in these migrants are obvious when they return home. They seem to be misfits in the local environment both in outlook and in mannerisms. The local and the international media have also highlighted cases of psychological disorders amongst the Fiji Indian women migrants resulting in suicide, adulterous affairs, failed marriages and murder. On a positive note, there are untold numbers of Indian women migrants who have successfully made the transition, and have made a place for themselves in both worlds, at home and overseas. They are much to be admired.

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Volume 4; Issue 2, April 2001 [Accessed 2 September 2014]

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